

Local Government and Social Service Delivery in Nigeria: A Content Analysis

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Abstract

Government exists primarily to provide services that will make life worth living. Accordingly, local governments as third tier government are created to bring government closer to the people at the grassroots and for transformation of lives at the rural level. One of the ways of bringing government closer to the people at the grassroots is through the delivery of service in a satisfactory, timely, effective and adequate manner. This paper is therefore an examination of Local Government and Social Service Delivery in Nigeria. It argues that the constitutional mandate of local governments in terms of "function performance" has not been translated into reality. Thus, the paper concludes and recommends that local governments must attempt to overcome the challenges that have circumvented their performance. It is only by this can they be positioned to render cutting services in a timely, effective, adequate, prompt and satisfactory manner to justify their continuous existence and huge financial allocations to them.

Key Words: *Local government, financial allocation, rural development, performance and social service delivery.*

1. Introduction

No government can satisfy me if it does not address the food poverty of Nigerians, the health poverty of Nigerians, education poverty of Nigerians, the infrastructural poverty of Nigerians, the energy poverty of Nigerians. GaniFawehinmi(cited in Anagwonye,2009:184)

Nigeria operates a federal system of government with a Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), 36 states and 774 local governments. As creatures of the federal government, local governments are constitutionally mandated to perform four basic functions: to provide a machinery for the discussion of local needs and for the provisions of corresponding services within the competence and capability of the local area; to provide machinery for the execution at the local level of regional or federal government policy; to provide a consensus mechanism for the resolution of conflicts of interest at the local level; and to provide a training ground for political participation and articulation (Okoli,2000).This implies that Nigerian local governments are to render cutting edge services that will foster socio-economic development of the rural people. If properly managed, local governments are viable instrument for rural transformation, development and the delivery of social services to rural communities in their jurisdiction.

Historically speaking, local governments have been assigned different functions. In colonial time, native authorities were primarily established for maintenance of law and order. With the emergence of independence, emphasis shifted from laws enforcement to the provision of social services (Adeyemo, 2005). How well Nigerian local governments have

carried out their constitutionally mandated functions have become a subject of national debate, among scholars and practitioners. To say the least, their operations have come under serious and severe criticisms with some persons calling for the scrapping of the third tier of government.

Local government service delivery has continued to dwindle and epileptic in nature despite financial allocations, local government reforms like the 1976. Therefore, this study is conducted to assess through content analysis service delivery mechanism in Nigerian local government system.

2. Significance of the Study

A study of this nature is significant in a number of respects. Firstly, the paper is timely and in accordance with national priority. Social service delivery since the inception of democratic governance in Nigerian in May 1999 has been a subject of national debate and concern. For instance, in attempt to improve service delivery of public institutions, Obasanjo (2004) notes the as government actors we dedicate ourselves to providing the basic services to which each citizen is entitled in a timely, fair, honest, effective and transparent manner. Government's commitment at improving service delivery in Nigeria at federal, state and local government levels should be listed as priority because Nigerians have for too long been feeling short-changed by the quality of public service delivery by which decisions are not made without undue outside influence, and files do not move without being pushed with inducements.

Secondly, the study is significant because it will expand the frontier of knowledge by identifying factors influencing service delivery in Nigerian Local Government Areas. These factors when clearly identified will go a long way in providing answers to questions like why service delivery has not improved in Nigerian local government councils despite huge financial allocations from the Federation Account.

Furthermore, the research is justified on the grounds that its recommendations will enhance policy decisions of government agencies like the Local Government Service Commission. In addition, members of the public will find the paper an educative and resource material. Future researchers on service delivery in Nigerian Local Government Areas will find the study a rich resource material for their research. A study of this nature is a training ground for the conduct of cutting edge research in the field of Public Administration and Local Government Studies.

3. Theoretical Framework

Although there are extant competing theories in social sciences and administration that can guide a study of this nature, the one we consider suitable in analyzing and understanding the problem under investigation is the structural-functionalism theory. In its simplest form, structural-functionalism or in many contexts simply functionalism "sets out to interpret society as a structure with interrelated parts" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/structural_functionalism) with each structure performing role function. The failure of one structure leads to dysfunctionality or disorderliness in the system.

Structural-functionalists like Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell posited that for proper understanding of the structures (institutions) in the society, there is need to place them in a meaningful and dynamic historical context (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/structural_functionalism).

Situated within the present study, the above postulations have relevant applicability in understanding and analyzing service delivery in Nigerian local governments. Local governments are structures created in Nigeria to perform specific functions that will help bring government closer to the people. As advised by Almond and Powell, an historical study of local governments in Nigeria from its traditional forms like the traditional political system, Native Authority and modern local government systems has brought to fore some of the service delivery functions of local governments in Nigeria. Furthermore, the idea of dysfunctionality or disorderliness advanced by structural functionalists could be used in explaining the incapacity of local governments to deliver services to the people in a timely, adequate and satisfactory manner. As a system consisting of interrelated parts or components, local governments cannot exist in isolations.

Put differently, Local Government Councils in Nigeria consist of departments like works, land, survey and housing; agricultural and natural resources; health, education and social services; administration; budget and statistics and treasury. Each of these departments must interact together to keep the local government moving and effective. Besides, the interactions within the local government milieu, interactions with bodies like the federal government, states, local service commissions, local government councils, rural communities and others must be sustained in an atmosphere of intergovernmental relations aimed at delivering quality service in a timely, satisfactory, honest, effective and transparent manner. Three departments are inevitable as Almond aptly stated wherever there are functions, there must be structures

to perform them (cited in Okoli, 2000:33). To justify the reasons for creating local governments, local government spending, functions performed by local government workers, interactions between and among its component parts, projects executed by local governments should be aimed at "providing the basic services to which each citizen is entitled in a timely, fair, honest, effective and transparent manner" ('Servicom and the citizen', www.servicenigeria.com).

Nigerians have the right to be served right whether at federal, state or local government levels. So, 'dysfunctionalism' in the operations of local governments in Nigeria can be corrected through identifying factors that have hampered service delivery and making appropriate prescriptions (recommendations) based on the findings of the study.

4. The Evolution of Local Government in Nigeria

The evolution of local government in Nigeria can be briefly divided into three phases: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial or neo-colonial. In the pre-colonial phase, different traditional systems of government existed which were adequate to satisfy the political needs of the different ethnic groups at that time (Okoli, 2000). These traditional political systems were considered as a form of local government created by ethnic groups – Hausa/Fulani, Ibo, Yoruba, etc for the provision of social services to meet the needs of the people within their domains.

The second phase in the development of local government in Nigeria was the disarticulation of the traditional political systems. During this epoch, native authorities were created by the colonial government. As it can be argued, this was actually a continuity of the traditional authority systems. The colonial Native Authority system as noted by Gboyega (2003:1), tried to fit local administration to the traditional political structure subject to the overall direction and control of colonial administrators. In terms of service delivery, as Ukiwo (2006) maintained, the Native Authority was charged with the responsibility of collecting taxes, maintenance of law and order, road construction and maintenance and sanitary inspection especially in township areas.

With the demise of colonialism in 1960, a post-colonial phase in the evolution of local government was birthed. This phase was characterized by a multi-tiered local government structure in the Eastern and Western regions where both elected and traditional elements were accommodated (Ukiwo, 2006; Agagu, 2004). According to Gboyega (1987), a national reform of local governments in the country was eschewed by the short-lived military regime of Gen. T. Aguiyi-Ironsi perhaps because of the uproar and dissent its decision to introduce a unitary system of government generated. Things changed in 1976, following a major national local government reforms carried out by the Obasanjo led military government. The reform was a water-shield and revolutionary in the sense that it was the first time a uniform local government was being initiated for the entire country. The reforms were also monumental in the sense that by one stroke, local governments were equipped with political, administrative and fiscal capabilities (Ukiwo, 2006; Imuetinyan, 2002; Oviasuyi, Idada and Isiraojie, 2010) for service delivery to rural communities.

Local government became a third tier of government with constitutional functions and responsibilities. Following the 1976 Local Government Reforms, 301 local government areas were listed in the 1979 Constitution to guarantee their perpetual existence and traditional rulers could only serve the councils in advisory capacities (Ukiwo, 2006). The Babangida military government increased the number of local governments from 301 in 1976 to 453 in 1989, and 589 in 1991. The Abacha regime also increased the number to 774 local government areas (Ajayi, 2000). Babangida and Abacha regimes may have instrumentalized creation of local government areas as a means of gaining legitimacy (Ukiwo, 2006) and acceptance.

5. The Essence of Local Government to Rural Communities in Nigeria

The expediency for the existence of local government anywhere in the world stems from the need to facilitate development at the grassroots. Within this understanding, local governments were created in Nigeria as a third tier of government to ensure effective, measurable and efficient service delivery to rural communities (<http://www.articlesbase.com/leadership-articles>, 2008). Some of the services expected from local government authority include housing, water, rural electricity, roads and transport, health facilities. Local governments are also required to bring about local economic development through the implementation of various initiatives. As a consequence, local government authorities have to be able to identify and target the neediest communities, have systems in place to track expenditures on projects and be able to determine if the allocation of resources has had an impact (<http://www.ansa-africa.net/index.php/themes/service-delivery>).

Apart from being a viable political and administrative organ for the transformation of rural communities, local governments also act as the training ground for the breeding of the grassroots democracy fundamental in national development (Adeyemo, 1995; Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010). As agents of rural development, local governments are to use funds made available to them by both federal and state governments and their internally generated revenue to improve on the lives of the people within their areas of operations through initiating and attracting developmental projects to the local government such as provision of access roads, water and rural electricity ("What is the origin of local government council in Nigeria?" <http://wikianswers.com>).

In attempt to clearly define the essence of local governments in Nigeria, the 1976 Local Government Reforms states that local governments should do precisely what the word 'government' implies at the grassroots or local level (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1976). This implies that local governments are to perform the following functions spelled out in Fourth Schedule of the 1979 and 1999 Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria:

- (a) the formulation of economic plans and development schemes for the local government areas;
- (b) collection of rates, radio and television licenses;
- (c) establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds and homes for destitute or the 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, markets, motor-parks and public conveniences;
- (f) construction and maintenance of roads, streets, street lightings, drains, parks, gardens, open spaces or 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 marriages;
- (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;
- (k) control and regulation of:
 - i. movement and keeping of pets of all descriptions,
 - ii. outdoor advertising,
 - iii. shops and kiosks,
 - iv. restaurants, bakeries and other places for sale of goods to the public,
 - v. laundries, and
 - vi. licensing, regulation and control of the sale liquor (FGN ,1979; FGN ,1999 and Onyishi and Obi, 2004).

How well local governments have performed in discharging their responsibilities has been a subject of national concern. This takes us to the issue of assessing service delivery in Nigerian local governments.

6. An Assessment of Service Delivery in Nigerian Local Governments

It is the general agreement of most scholars and professionals that local governments in Nigeria have not justified the reasons for their creation through the delivery of cutting edge services to the rural people. This is glare in the following expression of ex-president Obasanjo in 2003:

What we have witnessed is the abysmal failure of the local government system. It is on record that at no time in the history of the country has there been the current level of funding accruing to the local governments from the federation account, yet the hope for rapid and sustained development has been a mirage as successive councils have grossly under-performed in (their assigned responsibilities). Almost all the areas of their mandate..., yet the clamour for the creation of more LGAs has not abated (Obasanjo, 2003).

Obasanjo's observation shows among others that local governments have produced exactly opposite the original objectives for their creation. As Ukiwo (2006:2) maintained, instead of bringing government and development closer to the people, local governments have produced absentee local government chairmen who are only seen at council headquarters when the monthly 'Abuja Allocation' arrives and vamoose with their standby jeeps and mobile police escorts after superintending over the sharing of the local government's share of the national cake among the relevant stakeholders.

Ukiwo's views are also supported by Agba (2006) when he noted that, the provision of basic social services such as education and health, as well as maintenance of roads and public utilities within the jurisdictions of local government is both a myth and mirage. As a consequence of the failure of local governments in service delivery, the citizens are beginning to lose trust in government as an institution established to address the needs of the masses.

A 2008 survey conducted by Afrobarometer (2008) shows that most Nigerians do not trust local government officials. An earlier survey (2007) also revealed that majority (55%) of the respondents disapproved of the performance of the local government while 37% respondents who approved of the performance of local governments may have been government officials or political contractors who have benefited financially or in kind from the corrupt practices in the local government councils. Lewis and Alemika (2005) also discovered in their study that Nigerians are deeply dissatisfied with the performance of democracy and that trust in major institutions has diminished.

There is need therefore to find out the factors that account for the poor performance of public institutions like local governments in service delivery. This therefore is the focus of the next section of this seminar paper. Knowing these factors will go a long way in revealing ways through which service delivery can be improved in Nigerian local governments.

7. Factors Affecting Service Delivery of Local Government Areas in Nigeria

A number of factors have militated against the ability of local governments to deliver services in a timely, fair, satisfactory, honest and transparent manner required of them. These factors are briefly discussed below:

Corruption: The inability of local governments to provide services of a suitable quality as demanded by 'SERVICOM' to the people has been linked to high levels of corruption among local governments' officials. The hydra-headed cankerworm of corruption has become part and parcel of local government operations and activities in Nigeria. In February 2010, the chairman of Ijebu East Local Government Council in Ogun State was suspended from office on account of various financial misdeeds. Similarly, in Benue State about two years ago (2010), the House of Assembly suspended 12 council chairmen in the state and directed that the chairmen should refund a total of 150 million naira being financial misdeeds associated with the excess crude funds received by local governments in the state (*National Mail*, Issue 12).

In Kogi State, the chairman of Ibaji and OgoriMangogo Local Government Areas were suspended over what was described as non-performance and misappropriation of resources. It was alleged that the statutory allocation of 75 million naira received by Ibaji Local Government for December 2008 was neither used for payment of salaries or implementation of any meaningful project. More so, the loan of 200 million naira or the excess crude fund of 380 million collected or received by the Ibaji Local Government were not judiciously used. Also illustrative and instructive in explaining the issue of corruption as an impediment in the non-performance of local governments in Nigeria is the arrest and prosecution by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) of a former Enugu State Governor, ChimarokeNnamani on the allegation of diverting local governments' funds in the state (<http://www.articlesbase.com/leadership-articles>).

The effect of corruption is that local governments in Nigeria are robbed of the financial strength and ability to provide basic social services that will foster transformation of rural communities and bring government closer to the people. According to Kolawole (2006), the lack of funds was no more a constraint on local government performance, but a mismanagement and misappropriation of the funds accruable to it. Corruption in the system affects payment of salaries and execution of public projects. According to Lawal and Oladunjoye (2010), corruption makes manpower development and capacity-building sluggish as the chairmen are not thinking of the need to train and retrain staffers but to embezzle funds for selfish purposes.

According to Ukiwo (2006:2), local government chairmanship has become one of the most attractive and lucrative elective positions after the presidency and governorship, prompting state governors to intervene to preside over the unbridled decentralised primitive accumulation. It is hardly surprising that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) alleged that 31 out of 36 governors have tampered with local government council funds (Ukiwo, 2006, *This Day*, 28/09/06).

Lack of Suitable and Qualified Professional Staff: Local governments have lost a lot of staff to state and the federal governments and private organizations. The creation of more states by both Babangida and Abacha galvanized a lot of local government public servants to seek positions in the newly established state governments. More so, the politics of political patronage has led to the recruitment of thugs and uneducated men into the service of local governments as a means of compensating them for that political support during elections. Local governments lack skilled, technical and

professional staff like qualified engineers, medical doctors, accountants, statisticians, economists, lawyers, town-planners, etc (<http://www.articlesbase.com/leadership-articles>). The end result of this is that the councils lack workers with relevant qualification and experience to discharge quality service in an honest, transparent, fair and satisfactory manner.

Poor Work Attitude: Most local government workers and in fact, Nigerian civil servants have been described as inhibiting poor work attitude detrimental to productivity. Poor work attitude could take the form of absenteeism, lying, indiscipline, laziness, lack of work commitment, lateness to work (Odiaka, 1991; Akerele, 1986; Ogunrin and Erhijakpor, 2009). Poor work attitude like absenteeism may be linked to poor pay, lack of equity and stagnation on the job – all of which compel workers to seek extra incomes from private businesses (Maduabum, 1990).

Undue Political Interference: The degree of undue political interference in local government affairs by either the state or federal government is worrisome and needs re-evaluation. Local governments in Nigeria lack financial autonomy and are often considered as an extension of states ministry. Decisions are taken by state governors and imposed on local governments in their state for implementation. Federal allocations to local government are first deposited into a particular ad hoc account before being disbursed. The motive behind this is to divert the money to another thing entirely which does not have impact on the lives of the rural dwellers but that will be beneficial to the state governor. This undue interference has incapacitated local government from effective functioning on one hand, and alienated grassroots people from enjoying social service delivery expected of local governments in Nigeria (<http://www.articlesbase.com/leadership/articles/local-government-administration-and-the-challenges-of-rural-development-in-nigeria-350828.html>).

In a study conducted by Bello-Imam and Roberts (2001), the following prominently identified factors underlying the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of local government in their service delivery responsibilities were discovered: (a) revenue inadequacy (b) the erosion of local functions particularly in the revenue yielding areas by state governments and their agencies (c) politico-administrative problems such as inadequacy of skilled and technical manpower, lackadaisical attitude of existing local government staff, official corruption, variable structures/sizes of local government among others, and (d) lack of integration of the relevant communities in the execution of local services.

8. Concluding Remarks

What have we done in this study? We have endeavoured to show through the hybridization of content and empirical analysis (i) the social services local government councils are expected to render to the rural people; (ii) that local governments have not performed well in the quality of services deliver to the people. (iii) unravel external and internal causes of dissatisfactory service delivery. Causes such as corruption; undue political interference or divided loyalty; irregular payment of salaries and allowances of workers; insufficient funds and poor observance of the principle of meritocracy in the recruitment and promotion of local government workers were among the factors discovered. The civil service bureaucracy is expected to be a meritocracy per excellence (Sanda, 1988). But in practice, spoil politics and political patronage has been allowed into the system.

As a way of concluding this paper, it is important to note that local governments will have to justify the reason for their creation and why they should not be scraped by rendering cutting edge services to the people in a timely, adequate, effective and satisfactory manner. To achieve this, there is need to address the character of Nigerian politics dominated by prebendal politicians which have affected negatively the way and manner in which social services are rendered in Nigerian local governments. As rightly observed by Bowman and Kearney (2002), people (nay Nigerians) want public institutions and leaders to govern honestly and wisely.

Building institutional and system capacity that produces the human capital that is committed to the principles of good governance briefly summarized as transparency, accountability, honesty, foresightedness, equity, justice, prudent management of public funds, strong leadership inspired by vision and direction that is beneficial to the masses,

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