



AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN LAGOS STATE

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ABSTRACT

Local government since its creation in Nigeria has been and is still involved in the process of community development which ultimately translates to national development. Though there is glaring evidence of serious inadequacies in basic social services and amenities to the rural community, emphasis in this regard has been placed on mobilization for sustainable community development. This paper examines the impact of local government in community development in Lagos state. The study adopted qualitative and textual method in gathering and analyzing secondary data for this study, participatory theory is adopted as its frame work. The paper argues that the role of this tier of government in fostering community development is not only insignificant but also marginal compared to what is obtained in the developed nations, this is so owing to certain myriad of problems that confront this tier of government; poverty, and inadequate finances among others. The paper concludes that development can be achieved, sustained, and fostered if these problems enumerated are solved and it will make local government more viable in this task. Thus, the paper proffers recommendations among which are: grassroots institutions should be re-integrated into the scheme of community development. There should be provision of sufficient funds for community development efforts by the Federal and State governments to the local government to carryout programmes, projects and policies that will foster community development in their domain.

INTRODUCTION

Community development as a concept can be said to be as old as the period man became settled. Hence in his attempt to live a sedentary life, he began to think out ways to better his lots and that of the community he belongs to: the point one is trying to highlight here is that the moment man started living in the community no matter how small or large, the

development of the society or community becomes paramount in his mind. According to Abbot, in Ogunna (2007) the concept of community development is theoretically a very old one.

Community development is not a new phenomenon in the political trajectory of Nigeria. In fact, it has permeated through the three major political epoch's namely pre-colonial periods, colonial, and post-colonial periods with different nomenclature. In the pre-colonial epoch the practice of self-help development activities was concerned with mobilization of human and material resources' to achieve self-development across Nigeria. They employed communal efforts as mechanism for mobilizing community resource to provide physical improvement and financial facilities. Community self-help was employed in constructing homesteads, pathways, roads, bridge, market (Idode, 1989). This was carried out by relevant institution like age grade, and village council particularly in the south west and south eastern Nigeria.

The expediency for the creation of local government anywhere in the world stems from the need to facilitate development at the grassroots. The importance of local government is a function of its ability to generate sense of belongingness, safety and satisfaction among its populace. All forms of government, regimes or political systems have so far ensured the attainment of this goal. Such strategy for ensuring national administrative development and political efficacy is found in the concept and practice of local government. In Nigeria's socio-political context, with multiplicity of culture, diversity of languages and differentiated needs and means, the importance of such an organization in fostering the needed national consciousness, unity and relative uniformity as well as preservation of peculiar diversities cannot be over-emphasized.

The *raison d'être* for the establishment of local government world over is to bring the pulse and the activities of the government nearer to the people (Ozor, 2002). However, it will be well-nigh difficult, if not impossible, for the mere presence of such government to make a difference except if and only if it engages itself with the process of community development. However, recently, the creation of local government which is government at the grassroots level has made community development to take another shape. This task of community development is saddled by both the community and the government. Based on these the study, is consumed with steps the local government takes to play this role. Lagos state located in the southwestern geopolitical

zone of Nigeria. The smallest in area of Nigeria's 36 states, Lagos State is arguably the most economically important state of the country, containing Lagos, the nation's largest urban area. There are 20 Local Government areas in Lagos State namely Alimosho, Ajeromi-Ifelodun, Kosofe, Mushin, Oshodi-Isolo, Ojo, Ikorodu, Surulere, Agege, Ifako-Ijaye, Shomolu, Amuwo-Odofin, Lagos Mainland, Ikeja, Eti-osa, Badagry, Apapa, Lagos Island, Epe and IjebuLekki.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Community development at the grassroots in Nigeria is in a state of crisis. This crisis stems from the obvious neglect of the areas in service delivery and infrastructural development. Since Nigeria's independence in 1960 till date, the vast rural communities of the country are in a deplorable state. The inhabitants of the communities mostly are battling with illiteracy, disease, neglect, inadequate provision of social service to mention a few. Rural communities are in very deplorable state of development. A lot of development projects need to be urgently planned and executed to make most rural communities habitable. They lack good motorable roads, bridges, good water supply and adequate school blocks and facilities for the teeming school population. Most communities have very scarce and often impure water supply.

Irrespective of the fact that Local Government has largely been conceived as the Government at the grassroots, and so being about needed enlightenment and development in the rural areas. It is important to have in mind that despite all these, Local Government is still faced with the problem of interference by the state in the running of the Local Government it also experiences the problem of poor quality man power and the problem of finance. Consequently, community development at the grassroots in Nigeria is in a state of crisis- illiteracy, disease, neglect, rural-urban migration and insecurity.

METHODOLOGY

The paper is qualitative in nature, generated data from the secondary sources. The literatures on local government and community development were well utilized. The secondary data for the study were drawn from relevant textbooks, newspapers, academic journals, conferences papers, workshop reports, internet sources, and unpublished materials. Content analysis involving systematic review, theoretical and empirical literature critique was used in analyzing the data generated.

Conceptualising Local Government and Community Development

The concept of local government in a broad term involves a philosophical commitment to democratic participation in the governing process at the grass root level. This implies legal and administrative decentralization of authority, power and personnel by a higher level of government with a will of its own and performing specific function within the national frame work, (Yusuf, 2011). Ikelegbe (2005:38) explained the concept to refer to "a segment of a constituent state or region of a nation state", established by law to provide public services and regulate public affairs within its areas of its jurisdiction. It is government under the responsibility of the local people and in the interest of the local population by local representative bodies.

Odenigwe (1977) on the other hand, sees local government as a system of local administration under which local communities and towns are organized to maintain law and order, provide some limited range of social services and public amenities and encourage the cooperation and participation of the inhabitants in the joint endeavor towards improving the living condition. In the opinion of Apadorai (1975), local government is defined as government by the popularly elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitant of a particular district or place.

Local government as observed by Orewa and Adewumi (1983) is the lowest unit of administration in a defined geographical area and with common social and political ties, the implication of this definition is that the territorial jurisdiction of the local government has to be clearly defined to enable the residents of the local government be aware of their civil and financial duties for the provision of services and for protection against health and other hazards. Local government is an authority to determine and to execute matters, within a restricted area inside and smaller than the whole state. This implies that local government involves the administering of services on a local basis by local bodies (Zoaka & Saleh, 2018). The concept of community development on the other hand is better appreciated by considering the individual words of "community" and "development" specifically then, both words jointly. Community is "a human group of any size whose members have a consciousness of living a common life and sharing a common destiny" (Coleman, 1958:421). In this regard, communities are cultural-bearing social units and

communities have hierarchies from the family or village to a region or nation. Ogunna (2007: 5) defined a community as “a group of people that share common geographical location, common cultural traits and traditional affinity which is normally a village or village group”. Development is not easy to define as Okoli (2003) stated that any attempt to conceptualize the concept opens up the Pandora’s Box of ideological conflicts, of conceptual vagueness, of strategic confusion and of ideational muddles. All the same, development is that “process by which the adaptation capacity of any unit is increased”. The capacity here refers to problem solving capability (Biller, 1971:104). Then marrying the two concepts, community development can be seen differently by different people obeying their specific biases.

Anikeze (2018) posited that “community development as a process of social action in which people took action to meet those needs with maximum reliance on their own initiative and resources, supplemented with assistance in any government and non-governmental organization”. He identifies some underlying philosophy and principles of community development since community development organized self-help to improve themselves through democracy, participation, and self-direction. In Nigeria, like in most developing countries, the governmental authority usually involved in community development is the local government because it is the closest level of government to the people. The goals of community development should be to improve people’s productivity and enable them to participate in their social, political and economic life into the future. This will give them more confidence in managing their own affairs and help to protect their environment. Indeed, it is morally binding on the local government managers to do everything possible to achieve the goals (Abugu, 2014).

Anikeze (2014), sees community development as any action in a locality by any agency with the primary intention of bringing some benefits to such locality. This implies that community development is a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with active participation and on the initiative of the community. Ezeani, (2004) holds a similar view, he affirms that community development is an educational process; it is something of the spirit more than something material. It must reach into deep cultural pattern of people, examining them and testing them as principle of faith. It is not a temporary, physical construction. It is a building within the heart and mind of men not a

recreation centre in the middle of a field. Eze (1999) defined community development as efforts provided for advancement of communities, hesitated that the major emphasis of the concept was upon those activities which aim at prorating the improvement of the basic condition of the community's non material need. This implies that community development is aimed at community action where community action is used as a phenomenon that recommends that community members resolve their problems by directly participating in development activities.

Anikeze, (2014) spells out the objectives of community development in Nigeria as follow:

- i. To improve life at the local community level as much as our human and material resources can carry us.
- ii. To develop all aspects of community living equitably so as to avoid in balance or neglect of any area of living.
- iii. To achieve a self-generating breakthrough in productivity and to raise the production potentials by stimulating the human and physical process of change.
- iv. To minimize poverty and unemployment in the communities.
- v. To make families economically viable and to cross over the poverty line.
- vi. To provide governmental services to communities.
- vii. To explore and use technical assistance available from outside the community
- viii. To cooperate with and coordinate state and national development plans etc.

Community development is seen as a deliberate effort made by group(s) of people with the same/common tradition, belief, custom and language, which live within a specific geographical area so as to tap available human, material and non-human resources at a given time in order to bring positive result.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is anchored on Participatory theory. The assumption of the theory are; involvement in decision making improves the understanding of issues; people are more committed to actions where they are involve in the relevant decision-making; people are more collaborative when they are working on joint goal. Participative theorist includes Kurt Lewin's and Henry A. Landsberger. Bryman (1986), and Gray (1996) observed that assumption of this theory is that many people are involved in the decision making process. This style opens up discussion for other participants to

voice opinion, suggestions, and concerns. Most importantly, it keeps everyone in the loop. Some noteworthy benefits of this theory are; everyone is given a voice, it gives every citizen a sense of accountability, it increases morale, and it can help one to learn more about his/her community. Participatory theory can be a sham when leaders ask for opinions and ignore them. This can lead to cynicism and feelings of betrayal. In relating participatory theory to community development in Nigeria, the theory is very useful because development requires bottom-top approach that involves people of different strata and this led to the adoption of the theory for the purpose of the study. And the principal objective of community development is for human, material and infrastructural items moved towards development through effective mobilization of both human and material resources with active involvement of the rural populace (Abugu,2014)

Local Government and Community Development in Nigeria

Local government as a government at the grassroots level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas, gives the councils substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and the federal government 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 conditions are maximized (FGN, 1976). The need to evolve a local administrative system that will respond effectively to the development challenge at the grassroots (community development) was the thesis for the 1976 Local Government Reforms.

According to the 1999 constitution, local government is a third tier of government in Nigeria, having its own identity, powers, functions and sources of revenue. It is however established by the state legislation and therefore answerable to the state. We can safely say that the principal aim of local government system in Nigeria is to improve the general living standard of the local people through the provision of essential services such as water and electricity supply; construction, reconstruction and maintenance of local and other access roads, bridges and culverts, health and educational services among others.

One of the central objectives of the 1976 local government reform in Nigeria was to mobilize human and material resource through the involvement of members of the public in their local development. Mobilization cremates an assembling or putting into action or operation (Abugu, 2014). It means equipping the citizen for the onerous task of community development, local government as a grass root government is designed to transmit the pulse of other aims of government to the vast majority of the rural populace and to equally mobilize them for effective community and national development. Being the government nearest to the rural people, it is the best institution for generating, motivating and encouraging mobilization for self help as well as including the much needed wider participation of the people especially in decision making. Economic growth and development should as a matter of fact, be among the priorities of every responsible third tier government in Nigeria. It is glaring that most local community in Nigeria lacks the much needed incentive to engage on any meaningful community development process. In the same vein, majority of their population not only dwells in abject penury but also, there is apparent low-per capital income which hinders economic growth. As a corollary, it will not permit them to generate enough resources for community development projects. The concept of social desirability implies that people would want to be perceived in the right direction, that is, to be seen to belong to the existing social order. Likewise, other rural areas in Nigeria would want to be perceived with success in terms of community development, just like their counterpart in the advanced countries of the World and thus, enjoying the advantages of civilization.

Community development will be well-nigh difficult If not impossible in an environment characterized by abject penury and blatant economic and social inequality. The local government must therefore provide the equal enabling environment to enable the rural populace, carry out their economic activities and thus, generate the sufficient resources to perform their civil responsibilities to the government. In line with John locks "social contract" theory, which implies that if local government is aspiring to mobilize its citizens towards the attainment of a stated objective, (say the provision of infrastructure or social welfare packages), it must provide the enabling environment such as security and equality in the distribution of common wealth to the citizens and at the same time, respond favorably and effectively to their other needs. As Okoli and Onah (2002) noted, "the elements to spur development must be found within the society... that

all genuine social development or transformation have been initiated from within the society. Even though in many cases the beginning of such transition lies in the cross fertilization of ideas and experiences emanating from different societies”,

Challenges of the Local Government System in Community Development efforts in Lagos State

The generality of the rural populace in Nigeria lives below the poverty line and thus, lives in hunger and starvation. If the popular dictum that “a hungry man is an angry man” is true, then such a man will be impervious to all gospel of mobilization towards community development. A man who cannot feed himself, or better still not feed well, may lack the capacity for rational thinking and can hardly perform his civil rights of paying tax as well as effectively participate in decision making. The local government system in Nigeria in general and Lagos state in particular is confronted with a host of problems in its role in community development. Some of these challenges include;

Low Executive Capacity: The local government suffers from low executive capacity. Some of the council administrators lack the skills and knowledge to perform their duties. An administrator should understand what community development is, and what it takes to develop an economically distressed community. Like a business manager who determines what should be produced, an administrator directs and determines the pace of community development. But, an individual cannot give what he/she does not have (Dike, 2006). The few available ones are denied regular training and re-training which will upgrade their skills.

Constitutional, legal and Political Problems: The problems militating against the performance of local governments in Nigeria could be traced to the constitution, our legal system and the nature of our politics (Agalamanyi, 2018). The local government council as a democratically elected government is, as earlier noted, guaranteed under section 7 of the 1999 constitution while the Fourth Schedule, details the functions. Section 162, subsections 5, 6, 7 and 8 provides for the funding of the local councils through a joint account. Paragraph 6 in particular provides “Each state shall maintain special account to be called “State Joint Local Government Account”, into which shall be paid all allocations to the local government councils of the state from the Federation Account and from the Government of the state. This has reversed the reform carried out by

the federal government in 1988 (Abutudu, 2011). These problems manifest in the manner the state governments have handled the provisions of sections 7 and 162 of the constitution. One has to do with the practice of democracy in the councils as a third tier of government. Another relates to councils' financial autonomy and the capability to carry out its developmental functions. Following the letters of the constitution, the state governments passed the necessary enactments to give effects to these constitutional provisions. But, these have rather compounded the problems of local government and in fact, turn them into zones of governance crises (Abutudu, 2011:8). Through the Joint Account system, the fortune of the local government which the direct allocation from the Federation Account provides is severely undermined as a result of various deductions and diversions of funds tended for local government. Okafor (2018) maintained that state governments have used the Joint Account mechanism to hold the councils hostage and make them appendages of the states, these diversions and deductions make the local government very weak and non-viable because of heavy reliance on external sources.

Functions/Role takeover by the state Government: Because of lack of clear definition of their proper role, and poor image which some of them created for themselves through unsatisfactory performance of their functions, local government authorities started to lose functions to the state governments (Orewa and Adewumi, 1983). This loss of functions continued up to the time of the far-reaching local government reform of 1976 without due regard for the capability of local government to perform them. A vicious circle seems to be created as the loss of functions diminishes the power and scope of local government and does not make it attractive as a worthwhile institution to council members and staff. Presently, the state governments through the state environmental agencies interfere and take over the duty of local government – sanitation services. It seems that whenever roles performed by the local governments become juicy, the state takes it over to further impoverish the councils.

Inadequate Finance: Though the problem of inadequate finance has seemed to be improved greatly, there is still the issue of funding challenges. It affects negatively the prosecution of community development programmes and projects. This problem of insufficient finance stems from shortage of independent sources of revenue due to

“function takeovers” and state governments“ hijack of the local government share from the Federation Account already discussed. According to Mutiullah and Solomon (2016) most of the local governments in Nigeria are not financially buoyant to effectively participate in community development programme. The joint state-local government account has not helped matter as the latter is always at the caprice and whim of the former.

Corruption: There is also more importantly the evil of corruption among local government officials who see their service in the council as opportunity to amass wealth to the detriment of community development of the area. Consequently, we believe that presently the problem is not inadequate finance but poor management of fund by the states and local governments even in the face of shortage of revenue sources.

Lack of Term Building/Team Work: Although there are other reasons for the creation of local governments, the main criterion for assessing the relevance of a local government is how effective it is in services delivering. The effectiveness or otherwise in this functional responsibility depends significantly on the team players and team relationships in the management of the local government (Onah, 2019). According to her, through literature search and interactions with political office holders and career officers during workshops, as well as personal interviews, it is clear that there is inadequate team building and lack of team work in the local government in Nigeria. This problem exists both within members of a team and between teams. Ogunna (2007: 190) observed that subunits in local governments operate as autonomous whole having nothing to do with other departments.

Revitalizing Local Governments for Community Development in Lagos State

There is need for constitutional amendment and reformation of states“ independent electoral commission Just as the 1999 constitution makes clear that the government of the federation must be constituted by democratic means, there is need to amend the constitution to reinforce the provisions of section 7 (Abutudu, 2011:10). Accordingly, elections must be the sole basis of constituting local government councils. Any state law that provides for anything to the contrary must be avoided. If caretaker committees must be provided for, they must not be in place

beyond one month. The power of dissolution of councils by state governors must be restricted. Dissolution must be on a case by case basis, rather than the generalized, statewide practice that it has presumed (Abutudu, 2011: 10). Equally, there is a need to reform the SIEC in order to make them truly independent in terms of how the members are chosen, their funding, training and so on. Placing the burden of choosing the SIECs on an independent body as the Justice Uwais Panel recommended for INEC should be given serious consideration. On funding, the recent suggestion by the 4th National Delegate Conference of the forum of state Independent Election Commissions (FOSIEC) that a percentage of the Federation Account allocation to the local governments should go to the electoral body should be carefully considered. This can provide that much needed independent source of funding.

Effective team building and teamwork among officials of the local governments: According to Onah (2019: 252) team building centers on achieving the task, building and maintaining the team and developing the individual. Both the chief executive of the local government (chairman) and the heads of various departments have these tasks before them. If properly articulated and executed, teams in the local government will be cohesive and effective. Other team players are councilors, supervisors and career administrators. If these exhibit the pattern of behavior in their relationship with other members of their teams, Nigerian local governments will reap the fruit of effective team building and relationship for effective community development (service delivery). Enhancement of positive work ethics: Work ethics according to Ogunna (1999) is a set of values, attitudes and norm or standard of behavior which guide the workers' organizational behavior. Positive work ethics manifests itself in hard work, discipline, punctuality, honesty, cooperation, regularity in work attendance, loyalty and so on. It is the responsibility of the management of an organization, in the case of the local government, the executive committee headed by the chairman, to establish an enduring viable culture of positive work ethics through solid package of effective motivational devices embracing physical, economic, social and psychological factors. These could be reinforced by leadership by good example, positive leadership, free flow of communication and participative management (Ogunna, 2007:271).

Executive capacity building: Since the local communities are the engines of national development, they should be managed by "transforming

leadership/leaders"- leadership that builds on man's need for meaning, leadership that creates institutional purpose, and thus, leadership that can get things done (Dike, 2006). Therefore, governments (state and federal) should assist local area administrators by giving them training (conducting seminars, conferences) in general administration (community development, social service delivery, human resource management, monitoring of resources, etc). There should be capacity building for local councils to take advantage of modern tools of local governance that are being developed world wide (Abutudu, 2011). This must involve the political and administrative cadre of the councils.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, a modest attempt has been made to examine the role of local government in community development. Local government by its position as the nearest to the people, has detailed knowledge of the peculiarity the local people. Without the local government, the people will be kept aloof from government policies and programmes which is antithetical to good governance. The local councils have the prospect of transforming the communities but are challenged by constitutional, legal and political factors, low/lack of executive capacity, functional cuts and weak or apparent lack of team building and team work among officials and so on. Generally, local government administration in Nigeria has all it takes to provide the needed developmental apparatus as it affects persons living in the rural areas and the local communities in particular. It is pertinent to state at this juncture, that both the federal and state governments should shed their direct involvement and financial expenditure in favour of local government. Rather the two tiers of government should only allocate funds for the use of local government and leave the latter to run its own programmes with minimal over-sight function.

This paper identifies local government as the nearest government to the rural populace. The study contends that local government is the prime actor for social, political, economic mobilization, and galvanization of the citizen for effective participation in the community development and national development at large. Over 80 per cent of the population of developing countries resides in the rural communities. For this reason, rural/community development is conceived "as improving the living standards of the mass of the low-income population residing in rural areas

and making the process of their development, self-sustaining” (Udu, 2014).

Autonomy of local government will checkmate the excess control of both the Federal, State and on the Local Government. It will ensure Prudence, accountability and effective service delivery. Financial and administrative autonomy of the local government through disbursement from the state local government joint account will help to eradicate or sustainably check delay in state release of local government funds. In Nigeria, may state government arbitrarily deduct the local government allocations. Some of these state governors see themselves as semi-god. The disbursement of accruable funds as allocated by the federal account to the respective local government council, more often than not get grossly abused while some state will reduce certain percentage before releasing the balance. This third tier of government is always at the receiving end of financial shortage artificially created by their respective state government. How do you expect meaningful development from this unit of government. It therefore, makes sense to state that for any community development effort to be worthwhile and ultimately yield the desired outcome, the critical issue of rural poverty ought to predominate all other considerations. Most of these programmes were indeed laudable but unfortunately failed to have tackled poverty issues frontally as poverty continues to assume a sort of pervasive posture in the Nation. Arising from the above, this paper offers a number of recommendations as policy options and as a way forward to solving the age long problems that confronted local government in fostering community development in Lagos state.

There should be sufficient fund by government and non-government organization. Local government should equally diversify, and strengthen her internally generated revenue base through tax, levies, rates and other charges. Avoid using IGR for political patronage. Authority of the various local governments in Lagos state should embark on programme of attitude or value re-orientation for the people of their domain concerning feeling of social or stained isolation and lack of patriotism. Such programme might involve formulating sets of anthem and pledge that can be recited after the national anthem to flag off any official ceremony, other include the need for the local government authorities to always identify with the respective community during celebration like festivals by sending delegation, goodwill messages and gift items and by sympathizing

with them during community losses or crises, organization of periodic callogielia traditional sports competitions, cultural fiestas and establishment of traditional sports competition, cultural fiestas and establishment of joint business venture like community banks, market and recitation centers. Every local government should ensure that a community relation office is established and well-funded and staffed at the council head quarter, such officer shall serve as an effective lesson platform that can maintain regular contact with the community to ascertain their respective needs, feelings, grievance, current threats against the corporate unity or security of life and property among others. In this regard the rural populace will show community and interest in the community development projects within their domain.

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