

# THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Helen Nnedinso Ozioko*

## **Abstract**

Local Government is a veritable agent of development and grass root participation in the democratic process. It is a unit of government below the central, regional or state government established by law to exercise political authority through a representative council within a defined area. Local Government administration is the role of government in managing the affairs of the local people of a particular locality through planning, organizing, staffing, controlling coordinating, reporting and budgeting in Local government affairs. This paper discusses the role of local government administration in national development, historical development features / characteristics, challenges and recommendations.

Local government is an extension of Government from the centre or an extension of Government to the local Communities aimed at ensuring efficiency of Governance. According to Anikeze (2014), it is a Government operating at the base level or rudimentary level of society. While Abba (2007), puts it as work at the grass root level that is impacting on everyday life of the people. Nworji (2004) sees local government as an organ of the state put in place to paddle the developmental activities of a particular place or district, with a view of making the impact of governance felt at the grass root level. According to Okoli (2000), he defined it as a system of government at the local level exercised through locally elected representative council enjoying substantial autonomy in the exercise of specific power over a given locality in the performance of a range of functions and responsibilities allotted to it by law.

On the other hand local government administration is that aspect of public administration that takes place in a particular sector of the government that deals with the role of government in managing the affairs of the local people of a particular locality. Local Government administration has to do with planning, organizing, staffing, controlling, coordinating, reporting and budgeting in local Government affairs. It entails making use of the available human, material and financial resources available to the local Government to attend to and achieve the stated needs, aspirations, goals and objectives of the individuals in the local community. According to Nwatu (2000), the formalization of local Government administration in Nigeria was interlaced with the economic history of Nigeria which involved the activities and actions taken by the officials of the local Government aimed at mobilizing the resources of a given local community in order to achieve the goals, needs and aspirations of the people which in turn contributes to National growth and development. This indicates that local Government administration has a vital role in rural transformation and National development.

National Development is conceived as a process of economic, political and social changes with the aim of achieving better life. Cockcroft (1970) opined that National Development involves changes in the basic institutions and structures of society. Rodney (1972) took development to imply the increase of skill, capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing of the people. Some of these indicators are fully discussed as some of the challenges in local government administration in Nigeria in this paper.

## **Historical Development of Local Government Administration in Nigeria**

Before the advent of British colonial administration in Nigeria, each town or village had its own system of local Government. In the North, an autocratic emirate system was divided into districts and villages. In the West, the oba was the leader assisted by the council of chief (oyomesi) which was headed

by the Beshorun. There was an organized army to protect the area from external aggressions. The system looked like what was operated in the North, however the west had semi centralized system because, the obas decision was subject to approval of the oyomesi council.

In the East, local government administration was carried out at village and family levels. Denga (2003: 19) observed that, there was a pre-colonial village or local administration particularly in the East that was characterized by the same practices being observed today in modern local government, example democratic principles and elements of participative governance, as demonstrated by decisions taken by village assembly. During colonial period, the colonial administration quickly recognized the importance of local participation as a base for grass root democracy, and henceforth introduced the indirect rule system so as to involve the inhabitants in the administration of their areas. The Native Authority system of Local Government Administration was introduced shortly after consolidating and properly planting the in direct rule system. The Native authority system was introduced via the native ordinance of 1916. The Native authority system actually reinforced the powers and position of the traditional rulers. During independence, the geo – political regions in what is called Nigeria operated different systems of local government Administration. The North continued with the extensive centralization of council powers. A system that gives the traditional institution absolute powers. The west introduced council manager system which emphasized the dichotomy between politics and administration. That is, the difference between policy makers and implementers. It was an element of participatory governance, because the people elect their council to take decisions on governance of their local areas. The East introduced development Administration system because of the physical damage caused as a result of the civil war, to help develop the area.

### **Features/Characteristics of Local Government Administration**

Local Government is a geographical area/territorial location administered by people which possesses the legal right and the necessary organization to regulate its own affairs. This in turn presupposes that existence of a local authority with powers to act independently as well as participation of local community in administration of its own affairs becomes imperative that there are certain attributes associated with local body of a state. As a result, the following characteristics are therefore associated with local government administration in Nigeria.

#### **Elected Representatives:**

There must be in existence elected representatives in the local council that see that the administration of the council is accountable to the people. This is an important attribute that makes for effective performance of the officials in governance since they are selected among the local people by the people. This people will run the administration effectively as they bear in mind the wishes and aspirations of the people who elected them.

#### **Local Autonomy:**

Autonomy refers to the ability to manage one's own affairs without undue interference from outside. This refers to its limited discretionary powers to make and execute bye laws within its geographical jurisdiction. The autonomy at the local level of administration has to do with the degree of discretionary powers assigned to it by a tier of government in terms of functions, finance, administration and political matters.

#### **Geographical Location**

There should be a definite geographical location with boundaries for every local government area within the state. This is why it is seen as subjects of a state or political subdivision of a state. Its exercise of power and functions are restricted within a specified geographical area of jurisdiction which must be well defined by the law establishing it.

#### **Population /Clientele**

## ***The Role of Local Government Administration in National Development***

---

Local government administration is people oriented and as such has to do with those services specifically aimed at improving the conditions of the rural dwellers. It is therefore obvious that population is a necessary factor in the determination of local government administration.

### **Revenue Generation**

It is an established fact that local government by power conferred on it can raise funds by imposing taxes and rate. It should also be appreciated that it raises funds not just because it needs money to manage its own affairs but also for the fact that it cannot depend solely on the central/state government for grants and subventions. That is why Ogunna (1996), pointed out that local government in Nigeria cannot operate as a tier of government without adequate funds and skilled personnel.

### **Challenges of Local Government Administration in Nigeria.**

Challenge, according to oxford advanced dictionary, is a difficult task before somebody. Something that can make a person prove himself, either skills, ability etc. Challenges of local government administration therefore are things that put local government to the task of demonstrating its skills and ability towards justifying its establishment. Local Governments are created or established basically to provide government closer the grass root people, thereby providing the needs of those people without necessarily waiting for central government. The challenges of local government Administration in Nigeria therefore revolves round fundamental problems and obstacles for achieving those goals. It is the primary concern of this paper to explain the multidimensional challenges of local government administration in Nigeria in details. These problems / challenges include:

### **Autonomy**

Autonomy simply refers to freedom, independence, free from external and remote control. The 1976 reforms, provided for a third tier of government, making local government a tier of government that is a unit of government independent from other units. The 1976 constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria recognized local government as the third tier of government. Section 7 (1) of 1979 constitution. The autonomy of local Government as clearly established by 1976 reform guidelines and the 1979 constitution over the years continued to be a mirage because of the extent to which other tiers of government intrude in local government affairs. There are situations where Governors of state, unconstitutionally dissolve the entire elected council officers and replace them with caretaker committee. This development has made local government an appendage of state or an object of control by state .It is a major challenge of local government Administration, because local governments wait to take directives from state instead of carrying out self initiatives for the development of local government areas. Again, the practice of local government funds or allocation passing through state joint account is a serious impediment to local government and poses a challenge to its task of providing social and economic amenities for its populace or people. The ungodly joint account paves way for the state government to dictate to local government and again divert huge sums of funds meant for local government to other things entirely. Again, the practice of approval of bye laws made by the local government legislative council by state legislature renders the concept of autonomy of local government futile, since there is no element of independence and freedom of legislation.

### **Financial Challenges**

Local government source of finance is either through federation account or statutory allocation and internally generated revenue. Statutory allocation comes from federal government and the state government is supposed to augment the efforts of federal government by giving 10% of their internally generated revenue to local government. The problem faced by local government is that, the statutory allocation by federal government is delayed, not given on time. When it is released, it passes through state joint account and problems are compounded. Even the 10% that the state is supposed to give to local government is not given. This poses a serious challenge to local government administration, because no administration can achieve its goals without funds and local government funds are delayed and hijacked

by both upper tier of government. Again, the internally generated revenue of local government which is supposed to sustain local government is mismanaged and misappropriated by those in positions. Revenue allocators print their receipts nowadays and use for their selfish interest instead of using local government authorized receipts. This corrupt practice continued unabated because, people in high places also benefit from this ugly looting of local government funds.

### **Unskilled Workers**

Local government in Nigeria are faced with the problem of inadequate skilled workers such as engineers, accountants, medical doctors, town planners, statisticians etc. Reasons for this ugly development are that, there is a very low image of local government in the minds of these professionals. Again, there is lack of job satisfaction that can keep them in the local government. Most skilled and qualified personnel are professionals prepared to gamble their luck either in private organizations or establish their own firms rather than stay at the local government where there are no incentives and be wasted away. This has made local government to be surviving on unskilled labour, some are diploma and certificate holders who cannot defend their certificates. This situation is a great challenge to local government efficiency. People who do not know their left from their right in what they do can hardly be productive and effective.

### **Priority Misplacement**

Priority is what is considered most urgent or first before others. A hungry man's priority should be to eat food and not to drink alcohol because he will still be hungry and it will amount to misplacement of priority. The challenge of local government administration in Nigeria, particularly nowadays is priority misplacement. Most of the council chairmen instead of carrying out projects that would have direct bearing on the lives of their people, embarked on projects that satisfy their selfish ends. For instance, instead of digging bore holes to provide portable water, a council chairman is busy building a stadium or local government guest house, first because he is a sports lover.

### **Conclusion**

This paper captioned the role of local government administration explored the role of local government administration in National development, historical development, features/ characteristics of local government administration as well as challenges of local government administration in Nigeria and possible recommendations whereas in the recommendations, the paper argued that if the local government is autonomous, and its allocations comes direct from federation account with skilled personnel, the local councils would make a conducive work place that can give job satisfaction which in turn will enhance national development.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations**

The suggestions are basically from observations and experience and therefore are practical and problem solving as the case may be. What can be done to put local governments in their right place for maximum productivity is that, local governments should be given practical autonomy in terms of direct revenue allocation from the federation account. The ungodly marriage of convenience, tagged joint account proved itself repugnant and detrimental to local government administration. The blame on local government on none performance is attributed to this lack of autonomy particularly financial and political autonomy, the local government is not autonomous because of all this directives from state institutions and the state government. Remove all these problems and set local government free and independent as a tier, let local government get its allocation direct from federation account and the Poor performance will become history. When the above is done, local government will become attractive and professionals looking for jobs at federal government will prefer to be at home, hence there will be skilled workers in the local government system and greater performance will be ensured. Local government chief executives have to prioritize what they intend to do for the benefit of the community, rather than choosing to pursue what interests them as individuals or group. Local government is governments at the grassroots' level

***The Role of Local Government Administration in National Development***

where the inhabitants are supposed to be involved in the government of their areas. A way of involving them is to consult them, when they are properly consulted their needs will be known and pursued accordingly. The elected political officers of local government should be disciplined. Perhaps the conduct of local government elections should be returned to the Independent National Electoral Commission (I N E C) instead of state electoral bodies to avoid the incumbent governor fixing only the factions loyal to him to local government positions.

**References**

Abba U.E (2007), *Local Government administration in Nigeria. Issues and practice*, Onisha: Abbot book ltd

Anikeze .N.H (2014), *Theories and practice of Local Government Administration in Nigeria. A comparative perspective* Enugu; Academic publishing company

Cockroft J.D (1970), *Dependency and Development, Latin America's Political Economy*, New York: Aunchor Books

Denga D.I (2003) *Local Government Administration in Nigeria, past present and futuristic projection* Ibadan: Rapid educational

Nwatu D.N (2000), *Local Government in Nigeria an introduction*. Enugu: Amazing Grace printing Publishing Company

Nworji L.O. (2004), *fundamentals of local government administration in Nigeria* Owerri: Bon publication

Ogunna A.EC (1996), *A hand book of local Government A hand Book on Local government in Nigeria* Owerri: versatile publisher.

Okoli F.C. (2000), *Theory and Practice of Local Government in Nigeria perspective* Enugu: John Jacobs Classical Publishers Ltd

Rodney W. (1972), *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, London: Bougbe-Loverture Publications