

THE CHALLENGES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper captioned the challenges of local government Administration in Nigeria explored the meaning of local government and local Administration and examine the historical background of local government administration in Nigeria from pre-colonial to colonial period and independent Nigeria. The paper highlighted local government reforms in Nigeria and evaluated the problems of local government in Nigeria where emphasis was placed on lack of autonomy which leads to undue interference by state government making local council as appendage of state government, unskilled staff and indiscipline among other things. The paper suggested ways of putting local government Administration in Nigeria in the right path for efficiency and productivity.

Keywords: *Local government administration, Political system, Legislative and Reforms*

INTRODUCTION

Local Administration has been the concern of every responsive political system in the world. This is because, local Administration basically, concern the involvement of grassroots people in the provision of social and economic amenities to rural area where they come from. Again, it is government at the door step of rural inhabitants. It is assumed therefore that, the development of these local areas entails the overall development of the state. In view of the above, Nigeria state created seven hundred and seventy four (774) local councils across the six geo-political areas to ensure development at the grassroots level. These local government councils are however faced with series of problems and difficulties which in the longrun constitutes their challenges. This paper basically is concerned with highlighting these challenges and suggesting possible solutions to these challenges. The paper adopts a descriptive approach rather than prescriptive approach.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEFINED

The concept local government have been given various definitions by various scholars. No matter how differently the concept is defined, it focus on the transfer of political powers to local areas by involving the inhabitants in the provision of basic needs in their respective communities. According to Appadorai (1975:287) local government is government by the popularly elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular place or district. United Nations organisation

UNO in 1961 also defined local government as “a political sub-division of a state, constituted by law and has control of local affairs..... and the governing body either elected or selected.” The 1976 local government reform guide lines also defined local government as “government at the local level, exercised through representative council, establish by law to exercise specific powers within a defined area” The main issues raise from the above definitions are:-

- That local government is a political authority i.e it has the right to exercise political power,which means, right to take decisions which are binding on the people and to obtain compliance.
- That, local government is a creation of central government and subordinate to central authority.
- That local government is created by law and exercised its powers through representative council.
- That local government is government closest to the people.

From the above issues raised by the various definitions by various scholars and organisations, we shall now define local government as a political unit established by law to perform specific functions through elected representatives of the people at grass root.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION DEFINED

Local Administration refers to the administration of a community by a body which is not responsible to the local people but to those who appoint them to govern the community. Ugoo. E. Abba *et al.*, (2007:17) usually, such officers are appointed by the central government, and are seen as representatives of central government. However, local government is seen as government by local inhabitants freely elected to carryout programmes to improve the well being of the people at grassroot. Administration perse, is getting things done, therefore local government Administration entails the whole process of decision making at the local government level or selected persons by central or state governments to carry out certain functions for the benefit of the local inhabitants.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

Before the advent of British colonial Administration in Nigeria, each town or village has 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 council of chief (Oyomesi) which was headed by the Bashorun. They was an organised army to protect the area from external aggressions. The system looks like what was operated in the north, however the west had a semi centralised 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 level. Denga (2003:19) observed that, there was a pre-colonial village or local administration particularly in the east characterized by same practices being observed today in modern local government.e.g democratic principles and elements of participative governance, as

demonstrated by decisions taken by village assembly. During colonial period, the colonial Administration Quickly recognised the importance of local participation as a base for grassroot democracy, and henceforth introduced the indirect rule system so as to involve the inhabitants in the administration of their areas. Native Authority system of local government Administration was introduced shortly after consolidating and properly planting the indirect 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 Administration. The North continued with the extensive centralisation of council powers, A system that gives the traditional institution absolute powers. The West introduced council manager system which emphasised 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.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORMS IN NIGERIA

Reforms are all about the introduction of new ideas on how best to manage or administer an organisation. local government reforms therefore has to do with fresh ideas, innovations etc on how best local governments can be administered. The History of local government Administration in Nigeria explained some reforms or changes introduced at the local level of governance from pre-colonial, to colonial period. The major break through in local government administration is however linked with the reform of 1976. The reforms were hinged on the efforts to return Nigeria to civil rule, the reforms were characterized by uniformity in local government administration in all the states of Nigeri. Again, the federal government commenced the practice of giving statutory allocations to local government during the 1976 reforms. The introduction of full time chairman and supervisory councilors at the local level was another feature of the 1976 reforms. In 1991, the military government of Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida promulgated decree No 23 which introduced the separation of powers in the local government council. i.e separating executive from legislative councils there by introducing the presidential system practiced in the federal and state governments to local governments. Currently, local governments in Nigeria have two councils, the executive and legislative councils. Very many reforms took place between 1991 to date, such as the politicization of the office of the local government secretary and the introduction of Director General service and administration as head of administration in the local government. The establishment of the office of state Auditor General for local governments to audit the accounts of local government councils and several other reforms at any point in time was to introduce changes that would strengthen the existence of local governments and to improve on their performance, Despite these reforms, local governments are consistently faced with various challenges or otherwise problems.

CHALLENGES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

Challenge, according to oxford 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 to the grassroot 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 primarily concern of this paper to explain the multidimensional challenges of local government administration in Nigeria in details. These problems/challenges includes:

Autonomy

Autonomy simply refers to freedom, independent, free from external and remote control. The 1976 reforms, provided for a third tier of government, making local government a tier of government i.e a unit of government, indepenent from other units. The 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognised 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 guide lines and the 1979 constitution over the years continue 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 dissolves the entire elected council's 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 impedement to local government and posed 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 dictates to local government and again divert huge sum of the 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 governmnt is supposed to augument the efforts of federal government by giving 10% of their internal 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 passed through state joint account and problems are compounded. Even the 10% the state suppose to give to local government is not given. This posed a serious challenge to local government administration, because no

administration can achieve its goals without funds, and local governments 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 collectors print their receipt nowadays and use for their selfish interest instead of using local government authorized receipts. This corrupt practices continued unabated because, people in high places also benefit from this ugly rooting 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 personnels and professionals prepare to gamble their luck either in private organisations or establish their own firms rather than stay at the local government where there are no incentives and be wasted away. This have made local governments to be surviving on unskilled labour, some are diploma and certificate holders who can not defend the certificates they hold. This situations is a great challenge to local government efficiency, people who dont know their left and right in what they does 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 eating food and not drinking alkohol. If you drink alkohol, you 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 council chairman 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 bole holes to provide potable water, a council chairman is busy building a stadium or local government guest house, because he is a sport lover.

Indiscipline

This refers to been disobedient, indiscipline has to do with low moral behaviours. Staff of local authorities, from senior to junior cadre have various forms of indiscipline. Most senior officers of local authorities hardly come to work and when they come, they behave as if their offices bites them, they stay under shades and gossip, and the junior staff play the truancy even more, staking the effectiveness of local councils. Most local councils to day, you can only see staff when there is allocation, immediately it is disbursed, every one will get his or her share and call it a day till next month. This situation spell doom for local government administration and pose a serious challenge to local authorities. Immoral behaviours among staff make them to believe that, government business is no mans business and aboundon the rules that guide moral conduct and professional ethics. Official functions are seen as an extension of private life which can be done at will. These attitude has drastically affected the performance of local government councils in Nigeria.

Again, the people whom local government is established to serve are in most cases not involved in decisions that affect them directly. The result of this is that, the rural inhabitants lack interest in whatever the local government does for them.

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 rights place for maximum productivity is that, local governments should be given practical autonomy in terms of direct revenue allocation from the federation account. The un godly marriage of convenience, tag 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 autonomy. Political and otherwise too, the local government is not autonomous because of directives from state institutions and 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, poor performance becomes a history. When the above is done, local government becomes attractive and professionals looking for jobs at federal government will prepare to be at home, hence there will be skilled workers in the local government system and greater performance will be ensured. Again, local government chief executives have to prioritize what they intend to do for the benefit of the community, rather than choosing to pursue what interest them as individuals or group. Local government is government at the grassroot level where the inhabitants are supposed to be involved in the governance of their area, one way of involving these inhabitants is to consult them, when they are properly consulted their needs will be known and pursued accordingly. Also, the elected political officers of local government should be disciplined, top bureaucrats in the councils should develop the culture of staying in offices so that they will lead by examples. If a superior officer goes weekend on Wednesday and comes back Tuesday, his subordinate may go on Thursday and come back on Monday. If you stay in office all through the week and you assign work to your subordinates, they can not play truancy. Professional ethics has to be planted in local government administration for greater productivity. Also, the 1999 constitution, section 7 places local government under state government and made local government to be appendage of state government. state government interfered unduly in local government affairs and make them unstable. The suggestion in respect of this is that, local government creation should be placed under National Assembly to ensure equity and uniformity and remove the undue interference of state government that hitherto destabilize local government Administration.

Conclusion

This paper captioned the challenges of local government Administration in Nigeria explored the meaning of local government and local Administration and examine the historical background of local government administration in Nigeria from pre-colonial to colonial period and independent Nigeria. The paper highlighted local government reforms in Nigeria and evaluated the problems of local government in Nigeria where emphasis was placed on lack of autonomy which leads to undue interference by state government making local

council as appendage of state government, unskilled staff and indiscipline among other things. The paper argued that, if local government is autonomous and its allocation comes direct, local councils would have made a conducive work place that can give job satisfaction and attract skilled labour which in turn can improve performance. The paper suggested ways of putting local government Administration in Nigeria in the right path for efficiency and productivity.

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