

Decentralization, Local Governance and Public Goods Delivery in Nigeria

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Manuscript ID: RCMSS/IJPAMR/14008

Abstract

Political decentralization as a strategy to bring development to the local areas underpins the creation of local government administration in Nigeria. Thus, the principal task is to promote efficient provision and supply of public goods. But the crisis of development at the local government level which is attributable to the failure of extant local government administration system has raised the imperative of paradigmatic rethinking towards local governance. Unlike local government administrative system currently in place with its narrow and restrictive arena, local governance is all-encompassing i.e. involving informal institutions, networks, community organizations, neighbourhood associations etc. With service delivery, flexibility and participation advantage, this paper examines local governance operation in some selected areas-security, water supply; healthcare etc. and thus argues that local governance offers a potential solution to this endemic problem of development failure at the local level. Identifying patron-clientelism, corruption and political unaccountability as militating factors against efficient local government administration, this paper concludes that local government autonomy will guarantee the success of local governance in service delivery.

Key words: Local Governance, Local Government, Public Goods, Corruption.

Introduction

In recent years, decentralization as a strategy for effective local development has become an important aspect of discourses on issues relating to democratization, democracy and local participation. This has attracted more attention to the idea of strengthening or reforming the local government system, particularly in Nigeria. Ideally, local government is premised on the idea that it is the level of government that is better placed to effectively formulate and implement development policies and programmes that can effectively solve local problems. However, this idea seems defeated by the inadequacies and challenges facing the local government system in Nigeria.

Conceptual Issues

Decentralization

Decentralization is defined in many ways depending on the degree of delegation and autonomy transferred to the local actors. Olowu (1988) defines decentralization "As the transfer of administrative and/or decision making (political) power to lower organizational units. A second distinction that is made is between bureaucratic decentralization and political decentralization or devolution. The former encompasses the transfer of administrative responsibilities to field administrative units of the federal government, whereas the latter refers to the transfer of substantial decision-making powers and responsibilities to corporate units outside the framework of the central government such units include local governments, statutory corporations, cooperatives and even organized private sector.



Decentralization according to Okojie (2009) is a process of transitioning from a governance structure in which power is concentrated at the central or national level to one in which authority to make decisions and implement them is shifted to lower level governments or agencies. It consists of a transfer of public functions from higher tiers to lower tiers of governance. There are various reasons given by scholars for decentralization. Olowu and Wunsch (1990) argues that decentralization makes government more responsive while Trebout (1956) cited in Raymond and Roberta posit decentralization leads to greater variety in the provision of public goods, which are tailored to better suit local population. Jutting et al 2005 sees decentralization resulting in democratic institutions in which the poor can effectively participate, and lobby for their interests. Decentralization therefore is a downward vertical shift of governance from national to local level.

Local Government

Local government is generally referred to as the third tier of government. According to Anwar Shah and Sana Shah (2006) it refers to specific institutions or entities created by national institutions(Brazil, Denmark, France, India ,Japan, Nigeria),by state constitutions(Australia, the United States),State legislation(Canada, Pakistan),or by executive order(China)to deliver a range of specified services to a relatively small geographically delineated area.

These functions of the local government fall under the efficiency-services school classification given by Ola (1984), which states that principal focus of local government should be the provision of services. It is on the basis of the performance success or failure that the local government is been assessed. The proximity of the Local government to the grassroots makes it especially suited to provide certain functions far more efficiently and in a more cost effective manner than the much more remote government at the higher level (Abutudu,2011).

Local Governance

Local governance can be taken to mean the replacement of the view of local government; with its attendant structures and procedures by a plethora if not a plurality of providers (Caroline and Andrew, 1998). To Anwar Shah and Sana Shah (2006), local governance is a broader concept, which in summary means the formulation and execution of collective action at the local level. Its broadness encompasses the direct and indirect roles of formal institutions of local government and government hierarchies, as well as the roles of informal norms, network, community organizations, and neighbourhood associations in pursuing collective action. Local governance defines the framework for citizen-citizen and citizen-state interactions, collective decision making, and delivery of local public services.

According to Kauzya local governance does not make reference to local government or local populations alone. It refers to a situation where whatever governance actor (an international NGO, a central government institution, a local government agency, or a private sector enterprise) does is planned, implemented, maintained, evaluated, and controlled with the needs, priorities, interests, participation, and well-being of the local population as the central and guiding consideration. When it comes to local governance there are many stakeholders and players. They are in the Public sector, in the private sector, in civil society, among donors and development partners, at local community, national, regional and international levels.

Public Goods



Public goods like the concept of the public interest, is a normative and elusive which is ambiguous and difficult to define. There are various definitions of public goods given by scholars. The concept of public goods was developed in the economics by Samuelson in 1954. Samuelson's definition shaped the direction of the debate on what constitute public goods. He defined public goods as one "which we all enjoy in common in the sense that each individual's consumption of such a good leads to no subtraction from any other individual's consumption of that good". Olson (1965) can be given primary credit for the introduction of the concept into political science and sociology. Successively, there has been a proliferation of public goods analyses in all areas of political science, comparative politics and development economics. Generally speaking, public goods have two defining characteristics: non-excludability and non-rivalry. Non-excludability of public goods connotes that it is impossible to prevent anyone from consuming the good. By non-rivalry, a person's consumption of the good does not hinder or diminish another person's benefit from consuming such good.

Public goods are social outputs (or value realizations) that people in a community wish to obtain for the common good, such as a livable environment, clean water, good education, health care, security, and so on. A concept of the public good helps our understanding and our actions in policymaking and policy implementation, by acknowledging what is important to the people and the action to be taken to realize this (Jung, S.J, 1997). Local government in Nigeria like elsewhere around the world has been undergoing a process of change. Much of this process is the result of external changes over which individual local governments have had little influence. Like around the world, according to Caroline Andrew and Michael Goldsmith (1998) where increasing economic interdependence; the process of globalization; changing technologies; has had tremendous effects on local government system. Some other external change in local government administration would be the consequence of changes taking place within the nation-state: the privatization of state services; restructuring the local government system; changing inter- governmental relations. Some changes could be political or social. Political in the partisan sense, as when political control changes in a local government, while others might be social: widening social segregation in cities; growth in drug related crime, increasing corrupt practices, for example. And some will be generated from within local governments themselves, be they processes or layering, privatization, and contracting out of services; attempts at improving customer care and citizen relationships (Caroline Andrew and Michael Goldsmith, 1998) . The changing nature of the modern state and of the society it serves has had inevitable consequences for elected governments.

Among the appropriate questions that we need to ask at this point is how efficient are locally elected governments for the delivery of local public goods? What is the impact of intergovernmental fiscal relations on local public goods delivery? These questions are particularly of increasing importance as many developing countries are beginning to decentralize responsibility for local public services to local institutions. Nigeria is one of the few countries in the developing world to have significantly decentralized both resources and responsibilities for the purpose of delivering public goods. In the social-economic and political milieu in which these changes are taking place where the local government is also operating, has places pressure on the local government. Therefore the local government faces the scathing criticism of development failure that has led to what Caroline and Andrew refers to as the 'crisis



of legitimacy', in which there is gap between promise and performance. This crisis of legitimacy of the local government has generated polemical debates about the continued relevance of this third tier of government in Nigeria. These problems of the local government in Nigeria arose from certain constitutional contradictions. For example Section 7(1) of the 1999 constitution states that "the system of local government by democratically elected local government councils is under this constitution guaranteed; and accordingly, the government of every state shall subject to section 8 of this constitution, ensure their existence under a Law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils". Yet, section 7 (6a) submits that "the National Assembly shall make provisions for statutory allocation of public revenue to Local Government councils in the federation. The contradiction is extended further by section 7 (6b) which states that "the House of Assembly of a state shall make provisions for statutory allocation of public revenue to local government councils within the state". The constitution in section 162 (6) established the State Joint Local Government Account for the purpose of payment of "all allocations to the Local Government councils of the State from the Federal account and from the Government of the State". In Section 162(7) it directs State Government to pay to Local Government councils its total revenue on the terms prescribed by the National Assembly. At the same time it gives the same power and functions to the State House of Assembly in section 162(8)

Further, section 8 (subsections 5 and 6) saddles the National Assembly with some functions before creation of a local government can become legal. The implication of all these identified contradictions and ambiguities is that it becomes difficult to practically locate constitutionally the locus of power on local government creation. These contradictions in the 1999 constitution have become ready-made tools in the hands of some state Governors to control, subjugate and cripple the operations of the Local Government system in Nigeria.

What are therefore the implications of this crisis of legitimacy for the local government in Nigeria? This crisis of legitimacy have brought again to the fore the relevance of the local government system. The debates have centered on these perspectives (1) those who agitate for the scrapping of the local government. For example Lema Jubril (2003) cited the rising cost of governance as reason for the agitation, while Ochereome Nnanna (2013) lent his voice to this agitation insisting that the present local government system is antithetical and not beneficial to the communities of the South East Political Zone of Nigeria which he described as republican in outlook, which the present local government system has failed in meeting the needs of the people.(2) retaining but reforming the local government system and granting of full autonomy to the local government (3)transforming from local government to local governance.

The pertinent question now is how will the present local government system responds to the mounting challenges confronting it and meeting the demands of providing and delivering basic public goods to the people? In this era of persistent global economic problems and adjustments, and the globalized nature and consequences of natural disasters many national governments the world over including Nigeria are been forced by circumstances to fail in their delivery of certain activities or even reduce the services they provide. As central governments shrinks from the performance of these duties so also the local governments. For the local government, there are many reasons why this should happen: reduction in financial allocation to the local government, undemocratic revenue sharing process, and excessive politicization of service provision. With this prevailing decline in governance capacity and consequent decline in the delivery of social services, community people are using their organizational



capability to evolve strategies of meeting their own basic needs. Since there has been increasing realization that government appears unable to deliver and maintain social services for the people on a sustainable basis, people in various communities of the country, especially at the local level, have been organizing themselves into town/village unions and community development associations with the intent of delivering social services to their communities (Popoola, 2011). These individual community efforts at developing rural areas and in providing certain public goods and services have been hampered by certain factors. Among these is shortage of adequate funds to carry out projects. Apart from insufficient funds, such initiatives usually lack official government approval and are therefore seen as competing with the local government in service provision.

The acceptable solution and option lies in the adaptive ability of the local government system to change its modes of service delivery, device acceptable means to curb the ever-rising cost of administration and of service provision. This therefore demands a shift from local government to local governance.

From Local Government to Local Governance

Fundamental changes are taking place in the structures and patterns of governance. One of the major changes today is the increasing recognition of the changing role of local governments in development. Underlying these changes is a realization that participation is a key to good local governance. Assessing these changes, Corrigan, Hayes and Joyce (1999), observed that the role of local governments has changed in the following areas over the recent years: the way in which local government influences local issues; the issue of democracy for local government; the delivery of services by local government.

Though local governance is not fully operational in the real sense of the concept in Nigeria, what we have are flashes of cooperation between the local governments and some private actors in provision of public goods. Local governance is multi-stakeholder approach to local development. It involves the public sector, the private sector, civil society, local and international donors and development partners, the local community, state and national governments.

Local Governance and Public Goods Delivery: Case Studies

Local Governance in Niger State

The Jama'a Forum in Niger State provided a classic example of local governance. Initiated in 2008 by Governor Babangida Aliyu who saw the need to have a "communal round-table" discussion because of the disconnect that existed between the government and the governed. The Jama'a Forum is usually held in public squares and sometimes in the palaces of Emirs or district heads. The main purpose of Forum is to painstakingly arrive at project agenda through conflict and compromise, and to make the people have a sense of ownership of the projects. It also enforces democratic accountability on the part of government, but also bridges the gap between the government and the governed. It ensures that the elected give up some of its powers by narrowing the vertical gap. Here each ward dialogues and identifies a project it wants to execute (Road, Bridge, Market, Health Centre, School, Water scheme, Mosque, Church, Cemetery, etc.), while the state government provide the funding ranging from N500, 000 to N1, 000, 000. As a way of promoting accountability, no ward gets additional allocation until it has



accounted for the previous allocation and so certified by the monitoring and evaluation department of the directorate (Albert and Danjibo, 2011).

Local Governance in Anambra State

Public goods service delivery is efficient and the prospects for sustainable community development greater where there is an indigenous capacity to organize and implement small-scale development projects occasioned by strong links between the local community and the local government. In Anambra state there is the present of these two important factors.

The republican nature of the people demands the creations of groups/associations for effective local administration. These associations have organized and in many cases financed a variety of development projects on a collective and self-help basis in order to improve on the living standard of the people. Such executed projects include boreholes and wells, classrooms and entire schools, health clinics and hospitals, meeting halls, roads etc. A World Bank Report in 2001 noticed the collaboration between the state government, local government, the communities and the various associations in Anambra State. This collaboration is seen in the creation of an agency the Commission for Special Duties and Community Development which administers a program called the Joint Action on Development or JAD. The primary focus of JAD is on rural infrastructure, especially electricity, water and roads. It is based on two simple principles: (1) that the members of local communities know their needs best and (2) that community development requires local ownership and thus a partnership of efforts by the residents of the local community matched by state and local government authorities. Under JAD, communities submit proposals to the Commission for technical and financial assistance, but only on the condition that they will raise 30 percent of the project's cost within the community, and be matched by an additional 30 percent from the LGA. Anambra State, via JAD, then matches these contributions with 40 percent plus technical services. The state appropriated N420 million (\$3.36 million) for 2001, and seeks donor assistance to augment this amount (Barkan,J.D; et al,2001).

In term of security which is a fundamental public goods service delivery expected from all government, the high rate of insecurity in Nigeria and the inability of the Police Force to contain the ever-increasing criminal activities, various local government in Nigeria embraced local community policing initiative. This they do by engaging the services of local hunters and other local security outfits. They are stationed at interval along major roads where robbery frequently takes place. Effective local community policing has had a positive impact on the security of the communities involved by reducing neighbourhood crime, helping to reduce fear of crime on the high ways. Also the various communities arranged for local vigilantes to guard their areas. Apart from the local government-community cooperation, various local governments had partnered with the Police Force especially with the provision of vehicles for effective patrol.

Prospects and Challenges

Local governance offers a better improvement in local area development. Local governance will help overcome many problems that render the existing local government administration ineffective. There is also the challenge of misplacement of project priority by the local government. Many of the policies and programmes initiated and implemented by the local government fails to impact positively on the basic needs of the people. This is because they are

mostly initiated without consultation with the people. Siting of projects in areas or communities is done based on political party affiliation and supports and not on the need of the people. Jointly financed projects by the state and local governments are usually at behest of the state government. This type of state government directed programmes will now with local governance have the inputs of the benefitting communities.

Again it not only adequate for projects to be conceived and implemented in an area, one prominent challenge is that the people usually don't take ownership of the project located in their domains. But with local governance, communities take ownership of such projects, protecting them from vandalism and theft. The extant local government lack accountability. Despite being shortchanged by the state government as a result of the Joint Allocation framework, the magnitude of corruption at the local government is largely due to lack of political accountability. This will be solved when there is plethora of stakeholders interested in the development of the local area.

The degree of negative external influence and control of local government affairs by the higher levels of government which is disgusting will be checked when there are multiple stakeholders at the local level. There are instances when the state chief executive in wild display of power has unconstitutionally dissolves the entire elected council's officers .Such actions subverts democratic process and undermines constitutional authority at the grassroots level. The fear of the state executive constrained the local government administrators to dance to the whims and caprices of higher tiers of government. Local government will become stronger as in serves as a facilitator of network forms of local governance. This will erase the fear of irrelevance of local government institution and it been supplanted by local governance structures as it retain a significant proportion of financial and other resources in the local government.

The above prospects notwithstanding, there are challenges envisaged in the new partnership for development. The first challenge is the transformation in local government from being the central player in the development and execution of policy and delivery of public goods to being what Cochrane (1993) refers to as the 'strategic enabler'. This strategic enabling in local government amount to the truncation of its direct policy formulation functions towards a supportive or service role, which will reducing the power of the local government functionaries. The second challenge relates to the nature of local democratic processes .This borders on the undemocratic transfer of powers and policy making and implementation functions to some unelected group. This also brings to mind the insidious role of godfathers in Nigerian politics. Thirdly, the joint account framework that has been hijacked by the state will likely hinder the success of the local governance. Impactful programmes will be hampered by lack of financial resources from the local government which expected to provide the larger percentage of the resources.

Concluding Remarks

The challenges identified notwithstanding, local governance offers a better alternative to the current local government modus operandi. It is suggested that the granting of complete autonomy to local government working in active collaboration with other players in local governance, there will be accelerated development of local level. Local governance is not a replacement of local government structures and functionaries but rather a strengthening of its



functionaries with plethora of players in order to effectively deliver public goods to the people. It is pertinent to state here that with the increasing shrinking of federal government involvement in the provision of public goods, it is therefore appropriate that other players are brought in since the local government alone cannot satisfy the demands of local populace.

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