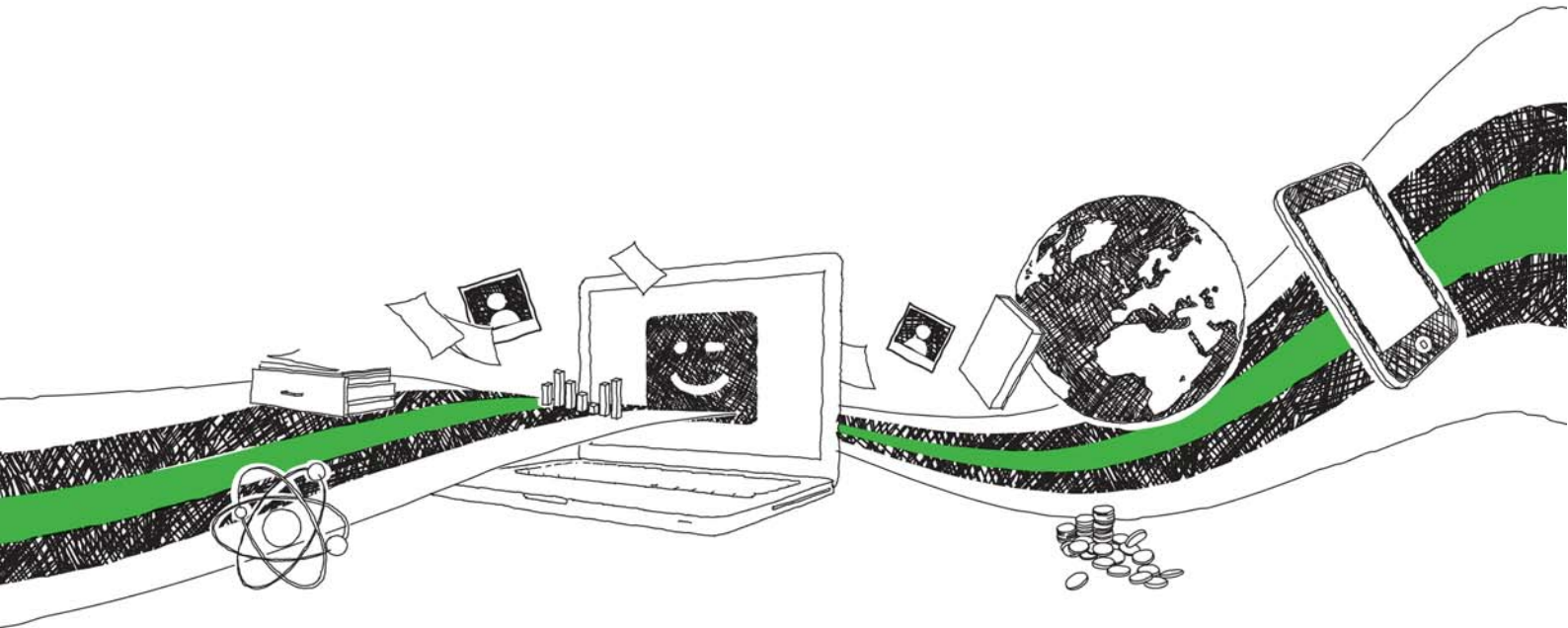


Rasak Salaam

Appraisal of Local Government Autonomy on Service Delivery at the Grassroots in Nigeria

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Appraisal Of Local Government Autonomy On Service Delivery At The Grassroots In

Nigeria

By

SALAAM RASAK O.

Content

Chapter One: Introduction	4
1.1 Background of the Study.....	4
1.2. Statement of the Problem.....	9
1.3. Research Questions.....	10
1.4 Research Objectives	11
1.5. Research Assumptions.....	11
1.6. Research Methodology	11
1.7. Research Design.....	12
1.8. Significance of the Study	12
1.9. Scope of Study	13
1.10. Theoretical Framework.....	13
1.11. Definition of Key Terms.....	15
1.12. Organization of the Study	16
References.....	17
Chapter Two: Literature Review	20
2.1 Introduction.....	20
2.2. Conceptualizing Local Government	21
2.3. Conceptualizing Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria	27
2.4. Conceptualizing Local Government Service Delivery at the Grassroots in Nigeria	36
2.5. Conceptualizing Caretaker Syndrome on Local Government Service Delivery at the Grassroots in Nigeria	44
2.6. Conclusion and Literature Gap.....	47
References.....	51
Chapter Three: Local Government Development and Growth In Nigeria	57
3.1. Introduction.....	57
3.2. Native Authority System of Local Government (1914 - 1959).	59
3.3. Local Government Reforms Before 1966.....	62
3.4. Local Government Reforms During Military Rule.....	66
3.5. Local Government Reforms of 1976	68

3.6. The Babaginda Reforms from 1985 - 1993	72
3.7. Additional Local Government Reforms.....	76
3.8. Local Government Review of 2004.....	79
References.....	81
Chapter Four: Data Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis	84
4.1. Introduction.....	84
4.2. The Significance of Local Government Autonomy on Service Delivery in Nigeria.....	85
4.3. Constitutional Powers and Functions of Local Government on Service Delivery in Nigeria.....	95
4.4. Impact of Local Government Autonomy on Service Delivery in Nigeria.....	98
4.5. Discussion of Findings and Assumptions.....	100
4.5.1. Socio-demographic Information of Respondents	101
References.....	116
Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations	119
5.1. Summary	119
5.2. Conclusion	120
5.3. Recommendations.....	121
Bibliography	123
Appendix.....	135

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The underperformance of Nigeria's 774 Local Governments has continued to attract policy and research concerns in the last four decades. This, among other reasons, is because huge amount of resources is committed to this vital tier of government but with poor reflections on the socio-economic lives of teeming rural population in Nigeria. More reasonably, Gani Fawehinmi (cited in Anagwonye, 2009:184) says "no government can satisfy me if it does not address the food poverty of Nigerians, the health poverty of Nigerians, education poverty of Nigerians, the infrastructural poverty of Nigerians..."

Nigeria operates a federal system of government with a Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), 36 states and 774 Local Governments. It is a truism that government exists primarily to provide services that will make life worth living. Governance at the local level plays a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness and provision of public goods to the vast rural population. The creation of Local Government anywhere in the world stems from the need to facilitate developments at the grassroots (Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013). All political systems seek the attainment of effective and efficient service delivery at the grassroots. This is because; Local Government service delivery system anywhere in the world affects day-to-day activities of citizens. Thus, whatever is the mode of government; Local Government has been essentially regarded as path to, and generator of national integration, administration and development (Arowolo, 2008).

Historically, modern Local Government administration in Nigeria began during the British colonial rule known as 'Native Authorities'. They were purely used to maintain laws and order rather than provision of social services, and the system was not uniform. The restructuring and provision of some level of roles, democratic existence and funding of Local Government administration began in 1976. The 1976 Local Government reform introduced a uniform system of Local Government administration throughout the country, recognized Local Government as third tier of government and granted financial and functional autonomy to Local Government administration in Nigeria. The reform was a major departure from the previous practice of Local Government administration in Nigeria (Oviasuyi, Idada, & Isiraojie, 2010). Since the Local Government reform in 1976, the statutory means for harnessing the human and material resources have been put in place to facilitate sustainable grassroots development.

However, the achievement of this fundamental goal is dependent on the amount of resources at the disposal of the Local Government and the prudence with which it is used (Otinche, 2014). It should be noted that one of the ways of bringing government closer to the people at the grassroots is through the delivery of service in a satisfactory, efficient, effective and adequate manner (Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013; Ibok, 2014). Local Government, in modern day life, is responsible for delivering basic services to the grassroots (its local communities) in efficient and effective manner, but unfortunately its inefficiency and ineffectiveness in addressing the primary needs and wants of the people at the grassroots has made the third tier of government irrelevant in the administration of the country (Bolaito & Ibrahim, 2014). Nevertheless, Local Governments are viable instrument for rural transformation, development and the delivery of social services to rural communities in their jurisdiction.

As a result of abysmal failure of Local Governments in service delivery, the citizens at the local level are beginning to lose trust in the existence or otherwise of Local Government councils in Nigeria. At this juncture, it is pertinent to ask this question; what could be the factor or factors responsible for the failure of Local Governments in efficient and effective social service delivery at the grassroots? An in-depth examination of Local Government performance in Nigeria reveals that Local Government has failed in effective service delivery due to a number of factors. Some of these factors underlying the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of Local Government in their service delivery responsibilities were identified by scholars in the field of public administration and Local Government studies as; lack of funds/financial constraints, corruption, undue political interference/ lack of autonomy, lack of qualified professional staff/ unskilled workers, leadership problem, poor work attitude, among others (Eboh, & Diejomaoh, 2010; Adeyemi, 2013; Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013; Ibok, 2014; Bolatito, & Ibrahim, 2014; Chukwuemeka et al., 2014).

Worthy of note is the undue political interference or lack of autonomy. A pertinent reason for the failure of Local Government in area of services delivery is the role of the state governors in the affairs of Local Governments. According to Eboh and Diejomaoh (2010), there is high degree of external influence and interference in Local Government affairs by the higher levels of government, particularly the state governments. The governors are fond of taking over their financial allocation, taxes, counterpart funding and refuse to conduct Local Government elections, but instead administer Local Governments with appointed administrators, most of whom are party loyalists, friends and relations and in the process have turned the entire process of Local Government's administration into reservoirs of mediocre. In fact, there have been instances where state governors dissolve the entire elected council officers without due process.

As soon as a new governor comes into office, one of the first actions is to dissolve the existing local councils, whether elected or caretaker (Abutudu, 2011). This, as the case of Abia State in 2006 when former Governor, Orji Uzor Kalu, pronounced the dissolution of 148 elected Local Government officials in which the Supreme Court later ruled that the action was illegal and amounted to "official recklessness".

In many cases, caretaker-ship is perpetuated through promises of elections which are invariably postponed. This has been the case in Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Anambra and others. The outright denial of democratically elected local councils through caretaker committees demonstrates the increasing authoritarian holds of the councils by state governors. As such, most state governors never bothered to conduct Local Government elections. For instance, as at 2013, Anambra state had not held any local council elections since the return to civil rule in 1999 until January 11, 2014 when the first Local Government election was conducted in the state. The high level of interference by state governors on Local Government affairs was also expressed by Khaleel quoted in John (2012); when he observed thus:

There is no state of the federation of Nigeria where one form of illegality or the other is not committed with funds of Local Government, through over deduction of primary school teacher's salary, spurious state/Local Government joint account project, sponsoring of elections, taking over the statutory functions of Local Government and handling them over to cronies and consultants, non-payments of pensioners and non-utilization of training fund despite the mandatory deduction of stipulated percentages for these purposes... nine states out of the 36 states of the federation have elected representatives running the affairs of their Local Governments. This is central to the whole problem because it is by planting stooges called caretaker committee, who neither have the mandate of the people nor the moral strength to resist the excruciating control of the state government that perpetuates the rot.

This undue interference has incapacitated Local Governments from effective functioning and alienated grassroots people from enjoying social service delivery expected of Local Governments in Nigeria (Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013). Consequently, Local Governments now functions mostly as extension of state governments (Eboh, & Diejomaoh, 2010; Ajibulu, 2012). The inherent consequence of this problem, according to Adeyemi (2013) is that Local Government has to wait for the next directives from state government before embarking on any developmental project. This has made Local Government an object of control and directives of a higher level of government.

Hence, these challenges continue as in the case of fiscal interference by state government. For instance, the 1999 constitution of Nigeria does not adequately provide for the financial autonomy of the Local Governments. It subordinates them to the state government through the provision of Section 162, Paragraph 6, which provided for the establishment and operation of State Local Government Joint Account (Chukwuemeka et al., 2014). This provision does not allow direct funding of the Local Governments from the federation account and various research findings have shown that state government manipulates this constitutional provision to keep the Local Governments as their perpetual appendages, and in large measures, siphon the funds meant for them (Azelama, 2008; Ezeani, 2012; Chukwuemeka et al., 2014).

The second dimension is the political interference. The constitution does not provide adequately for the political autonomy of the Local Government in Nigeria. For instance, it does not specifically provide for the composition of the Local Government council to be solely through democratic elections, not specified tenure of Local Government political office holders, and the

absence of Local Government to derive their full existence directly from the federal constitution for specific powers and functions (Chukwuemeka et al., 2014). The resultant effects of these inadequacies are that the state government has the discretion to determine the nature, content and direction of Local Government elections and political activities. In the exercise of this discretion, the state government decide when elections would be held, who wins in elections, when to dissolve elected council, and the alternative framework to administer the affairs of the Local Governments (Chukwuemeka et al., 2014).

In an invitation to remedy the problems, efforts will be made on how to enshrine a full-fledged autonomy of Local Government in the constitution, so as to enhance optimum service delivery at the grassroots. In subsequent sections, we shall examine multifarious variables that have also impeded the functionalities of Local Government in Nigeria.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

A lot of challenges have defeated the essence of Local Government which is to bring government nearer to the people, as well as delivery of social services at the grassroots. It is no news that the means of service delivery by Nigerian public institutions, Local Government in inclusion, is being hounded by the increasing rate of corruption among personnel. The hydra-headed corruption has become part and parcel in the Local Government.

The level of political and financial interference by the state government is worrisome and it demands total overhaul. The provision of an inseparable federal allocation between Local Government and state government by the 1999 constitution, in section 162, paragraph 6, for the establishment and operation of State Local Government Joint Account has hindered the

effectiveness and efficiency of Local Government (Chukwuemeka et al., 2014). More often than not, state government dissolve Local Government council and withhold the conduct of election at the local level. As soon as a new governor comes into office, one of the first actions is to dissolve that existing Local Government councils, whether elected or caretaker (Abutudu, 2011). For instance, as of 29 October 2016; Oyo and Osun state have not conducted Local Government election since 2007.

The poor attitudinal dispositions among Local Government workers continue to impede effective and efficient service delivery at the grassroots. This could take the form of absenteeism, lying, indiscipline, laziness, lack of work commitment, and lateness to work (Odiaka, 1991; Akerele, 1980; Ogunrin and Erhijakpor, 2009). The accumulation of the foregoing problems underscore the relevance of this, and hence this study.

1.3. Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study.

- (i). To what extent does Local Government autonomy influence service delivery in Nigeria?
- (ii). Do Local Government constitutional powers and functions enable execution of service delivery in Nigeria?
- (iii). Does Local Government autonomy has any impact on service delivery at the grassroots in Nigeria?

1.4 Research Objectives

The overall aim of this study is to critically examine the nexus between Local Government autonomy and effective social service delivery. In the light of this, the study seeks to;

- (i). examine the degree of Local Government autonomy on service delivery in Nigeria.
- (ii). appraise constitutional powers and functions of Local Government as regards service delivery.
- (iii). examine the impact of Local Government autonomy on service delivery in Nigeria.

1.5. Research Assumptions

Based on the aforementioned research questions, the following research assumptions are formulated for this study:

- (i). Local Governments ineffectiveness and inefficiency on service delivery are due to their lack of autonomy.
- (ii). Constitutional powers and functions of the Local Government do not enhance service delivery at the grassroots.
- (iii). Local Government autonomy has no impact on service delivery in Nigeria.

1.6. Research Methodology

This study will employ the use of primary and secondary data. The primary source of data that will be explored entails the administration of questionnaires. Also, the secondary sources of data will be explored through the use of textbooks, journals, Local Government laws and ordinances, newspapers, internet materials, federal and state gazettes. Equally, the data collected will be analyzed by the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) data analysis.

1.7. Research Design

This study adopts exploratory research design. Exploratory research design is adopted on the basis that it can be used to identify relevant and salient administrative patterns, laws, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, [towards Local Government autonomy and social service delivery in Nigeria] and to develop explanations of these constructs. It can be used to explore reasons that lie behind the differences of performance among Local Governments that may emerge from secondary data or survey. Lastly, it could be used to explore quantitative data and reveal hitherto unknown connections between different measured variables (Ogunbameru, O., 2010).

1.8. Significance of the Study

A study of this nature is significant in a number of ways. Firstly, the paper is timely and in accordance with national priority. Social service delivery since the inception of the fourth republic in Nigeria on 29 May, 1999 has been a subject of national debate and concern, particularly, at the local level. Government's commitment at improving service delivery in Nigeria at the Local Government level should be listed as priority because Nigerians have for too long been feeling short-changed by the quality of services delivered by Local Government despite the fact that it is the nearest government to the people.

More importantly, it will expand the frontier of knowledge by identifying factors influencing service delivery in Nigerian Local Government Areas. These factors when clearly identified (undue political interference, absence of autonomy, corruption, etc.) will go a long way in providing answers to questions like why service delivery has not improved in Nigerian Local

Government councils despite the increased 20.6% financial allocations from the Federation Account in March 2014 (Ojo, 2010 cited in Kalu, K. I.)

Furthermore, the research is justified on the grounds that its recommendations will enhance policy decisions of government agencies like the review of Local Government Acts by the National Assembly, and resuscitation of Local Government Service Commission (LGSC). In addition, members of the public will find the research work educative and resourceful. Future researchers on service delivery in Nigerian Local Government Areas will find the study a rich resource material for their research.

1.9. Scope of Study

This study examines the extent to which Local Government is autonomous in Nigeria and the effects on service delivery at the local level. In this regard, the scope of study spans within 2007-2015.

1.10. Theoretical Framework

There are a lot of theories in social sciences and political science that can guide a study of this nature, but the one we consider suitable in analysing and understanding the problem under investigation is the structural-functionalism theory. In its simplest form, structural-functionalism simply sets out to interpret society as a structure with interrelated parts with each structure performing specific function. The failure of one structure leads to dysfunctionism or disequilibrium of the system.