

Local Government and Service Delivery: Challenges and Solution in Anambra East Local Government Area

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Abstract

This study on Local Government and service delivery: Challenges and solutions in Anambra East Local Government was carried out to; examine state-local government relationship on local government service delivery; ascertain whether lack of fund is the bane of Local government service delivery; and examine whether corruption is one of the vices plaguing the progress of the Local government service delivery. Secondary source of data was utilized. The study looked at the functions of the Local government, history of Anambra East Local government and challenges facing the Local government in question and possible solutions towards service delivery. The theory adopted in this study is the decentralization theory. The following findings were made; lack of maintenance culture, financial crisis, excessive control of the council by the state, appointment of transition committee, corruption etc. The study concluded that Local government cannot perform unless it is free from the financial and administrative entanglements of the state government. The study therefore recommended inter alia; full autonomy to be granted to the council, revenue windows of the council to be released, democratically elected council through periodic elections to be ensured, discipline to be inculcated on the council staff by the anti-graft agencies and staff training and re-training .

Keywords:Local Government, Service Delivery, Political Interference, Grassroots Development, Economic Development.

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Introduction

Local Government is government at grassroots level. Local government is a creation of British Colonial rule in Nigeria. It has over time, experienced changes in name, structure and composition (Aghayere; Ariewolo, 2010). Between the 1930s and 1940s, local government was known as Chief-in-Council, where traditional rulers were given pride of place in the scheme of things. In the 1950s, elections were introduced according to the British model in the Western and Eastern parts of the country with some measures of autonomy in personnel, financial and general administration (Ola, 2013; Nwabueze 1982). It was on this premise that the rising tide of progress, growth and development experienced in the Local government in these areas was based. The place of this development was more noticeable in the south than in the north. During this period, heterogeneity was the hallmark of the Local government as there was no uniformity in the system and the level of development was also remarkably different. The introduction of 1976 reforms by the military administration structure of the system; the reforms introduced a multi-purpose single tier local government system.

In 1991, another landmark reform was introduced as the system had a legislative arm, in addition, the Babangida administration increased the number of Local governments from 301 in 1976 to 435 in 1989 and 589 in 1991. The Abacha regime increased the number to 774 local councils that we presently have in Nigeria (Ola, 2014; Ajayi, 2000).

However, the establishment of Local government in Nigeria arises from the need to facilitate rural development through infrastructure development and effective service delivery (Sharpe, 2008). Section 7(i) of the 1999 Constitution empowered local governments to construct and maintain rural roads, street lighting, water and drains and other public highways or such public facilities (FGN, 1999).

The recognition and importance of Local government in the development process is based on the imperative to tackle local socio-economic problems and to manage grassroots development through the provision of this basic infrastructure (Nkwede, Udeuhele&Obona, 2020; Iwunsch, 2001; Anwar & Sana, 2006).

In Nigeria today, the overriding impression is that the Local government system is weak in responding to the challenges posed by effective service delivery. This paper therefore is to look at Local government and service delivery looking at the challenges and solutions in Anambra East Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

The Local Government system as a third tier of government designed for grassroots development is in a position of the local people more than the higher tiers of the state and federal governments. In other words, the recognition and importance of local government in the development process is based on the imperative to tackle local socio-economic problems and to manage grassroots development through the provision and delivery of services. Despite these provisions, lack of adequate, affordable and reliable infrastructure services still touches the life of rural Nigerian families every day, water supply is neither safe nor adequate for their needs, local roads are impassable and the potentials for agricultural processing, small business development and rural employment is constrained by lack of electricity. Local government contributions to rural infrastructure have been minimal when compared to the amount of resources which accrue to it (Sharpe, 2008). Local people have become disillusioned as a result of unfulfilled expectation (Ayee, 2003). In Nigeria today, the general impression and belief is that local governments are weak in responding to the challenges posed by rural infrastructure provision and delivery. There is general corruption among staff; truancy and lack of dedication to duty; unqualified, untrained and inexperienced staff; lack of adequate fund, and excessive control and usurpation of local government functions by the state government.

The local government as the third tier of government nearest to the people has, since the colonial era been recognized as an institution capable of transforming the lives of the local dwellers through effective service delivery for the better.

This study therefore, is to broadly assess local government and service delivery with a study of Anambra East Local Government Area Anambra state looking at the challenges and solutions.

Specifically, the study among other things will seek to: examine state-local government relationship on local government service delivery; ascertain whether lack of funds is the bane of local government service delivery; and examine whether corruption is one of the vices plaguing the progress of the local government service delivery.

Literature Review

Concept of Local Government:

The Federal Government of Nigeria, through the 1976 local government Reforms, explained local government as follows: “Local government is government at local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific power within defined areas” (Government Print, 1976).

The United Nations Office for Public Administration explained local government as: A political division of a nation (in a Federal or State System) which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the power to impose taxes to exact labour for prescribed purposes.

Robson, in the Encyclopedia of the Social Services, defines local government as involving “The conception of a territorial, non-sovereign community possessing the legal right and the necessary organ to regulate its own affairs. This, in turn, presupposes the

existence of a local authority with the power to act independently of external control as well as the participation of the local community in the administration of its affairs”.

The Encyclopedia Americana, International Edition (2010), volume17, defines Local Government as; “a political subdivision of national government or in the case of Federal System, a subdivision of regional government”.

The New Columbia Encyclopedia (4th Ed), defines Local Government as the: “sub-political administration of the smallest subdivisions of a country’s territory and population. Ugwu (2002) defines Local Government as ‘the lowest unit of administration to whose laws and regulations communities who live in a defined geographical area and with a common social and political ties are subject,

Through these definitions may tend to vary, yet they expose features of Local Government, among which are that:

- i. Local Government is government at the local level
- ii. It has its autonomous existence and endowed with legal status;
- iii. Specific powers are reserved for it;
- iv. It can impose taxes and incur expenses;
- v. It exists within a defined territory;
- vi. It is seen as distinct tier of Government; and
- vii. It must provide authority over a given population

Functions of Local Government

According to the Fourth Schedule 1 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, the main functions of a Local Government council are as follows:

- a. The consideration and the making of recommendations to a State Commission on economic planning or any similar body on;

- i. The economic development of the state, particularly in so far as the areas of authority of the council and of the state are affected, and
 - ii. Proposal made by the said commission or body;
- b. Collection of rates, radio and television licenses;
- c. Establishment, maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds and homes for the destitute or infirm;
- d. Licensing of bicycles, trucks (other than mechanically propelled trucks), canoes, wheelbarrows and carts;
- e. Establishment, maintenance and regulation of slaughterhouses, slaughter slabs, markets, motor parks and public conveniences;
- f. Construction and maintenance of roads, streets, street lightings, drains and other public highways, parks, gardens, open spaces, or such public facilities as may be prescribed from time to time by the House of Assembly of a state;
- g. Naming of roads and streets and numbering of houses;
- h. Provision and maintenance of public conveniences, sewage and refuse disposal;
- i. Registration of all births, deaths and marriages;
- j. Assessment of privately owned houses or tenements for the purpose of levying such rates as may be prescribed by the House of Assembly of a state; and
- k. Control and regulation of:
 - i. Out-door advertising and hoarding;
 - ii. Movement and keeping of pets of all descriptions;
 - iii. Shops and kiosks;
 - iv. Restaurants, bakeries and other places for sale;
 - v. Laundries, and
 - vi. Licensing, regulation and control of the sale of liquor.

Under section 2 of the Fourth Schedule, the functions of a Local Government Council shall include participation of such council in the government of a state as respects the following matters:

- a. The provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education;
- b. The development of agriculture and natural resources, other than the exploitation of minerals;
- c. The provision and maintenance of health services; and
- d. Such other functions may be conferred on a Local Government Council by the House of Assembly of the state.

Brief History of Anambra East

Anambra East is in Anambra state. Anambra state is a state in South-eastern Nigeria. The name was derived from the Anambra River (Omambala) which is the tributary of the famous River Niger. Anambra state is the eight most populous state and the second most densely populated state in Nigeria. It is rich in natural gas, crude oil, bauxite, ceramic and has an almost 100 percent arable soil. It is a state that has many other resources in terms of agro-based activities like fishery and crop cultivation and husbandry. There are 21 local Government Areas in Anambra State which include: Aguata, Anambra East, Anambra West, Ayamelu, Awka North, Awka South, Anaocha, Dunukofia, Ekwusigo, Idemili North, Idemili South, Ihiala, Njikoka, Orumba South, Orumba North, Onitsha South, Oyi, Onitsha North, Nnewi North, Nnewi South and Ogbaru.

Anambra East Local Government lies on the coast of Anambra River. At present, the population projection from 2006 population census is 152,149 (nigeriaworld.com/.../112html). The local government areas in Anambra East include Aguleri, Enugwu-Aguleri, EziaguluOtu-Aguleri, EnugwuOtu-Aguleri, umuobaAnam, Nando, Ikem-IviteNando Autonomous Community, Igbariam, Nsugbe, Umueri and Otuocha.

The Headquarters is at Otuocha. Anambra East is the home of the famous Orient Petroleum. The oil was discovered at the bank of Aguleri town and was commissioned for exploration by former President GoodluckEbele Jonathan. In the previous administration of the former governor, His Excellency Willie Obiano, a new Airport has been flagged off by the State Government at Umueri. A new mini-stadium is under construction also by the state government under the local government project.

There is a good number of primary and secondary schools in the local government; about 26 health centres, one college of education – NwaforOrizu college of Education, Nsugbe and one university – ChukwuOdumegwu University, former Anambra state University.

Anambra East local government which has 15 electoral wards, is presently under the leadership of a transition committee headed by a transition chairman appointed by the present Governor, CharlseSoludo.

Challenges of Grassroots Service Delivery in Anambra East Local Government

Lack of Maintenance Culture

Infrastructural provision in the grassroots faces serious challenges. One of the obvious problems is the lack of maintenance culture. Local Government is fond of constructing new projects with the little fund given to them rather than taking good care of the existing ones. These new projects sometimes are used by the politicians to boost their image and that of their political party to enable them to get necessary support from their people. In another dimension, embarking on new projects makes diversion of public funds to private use easier than the maintenance of the existing ones.

Financial crisis

Also, the financial crisis is another factor that impedes the capacity of local government to provide infrastructure. Many local governments lacked the required funds to provide and maintain infrastructure, for instance, 96% of their monthly allocation was held by the state through a joint account leaving only 4% for capital expenditure.

Excessive Control/Interference by the State Government

Odoh 2004; &Nkwede J. O; Udeuhele G. I. &Obona, E. E (2020) were all in agreement that local government as an instrument of rural infrastructure development has remained inactive over the years as result of excessive control and various interferences exercised by the state government. This arises from the fact that most of the funding for local government comes from federal transfer to the local government via the state hence, the government is incapacitated.

Frequent Changes in Rules and Leadership

Agagu (2004) hinges the inability of Local government to facilitate rural infrastructure on the incessant changes in policies and structure of local government in Nigeria. He argues that this situation is in contrast to what obtains in many developed countries. Such incessant changes no doubt constitute some problems to the operations and performance of this level as they subject the institution to perpetual learning of new rules with little or no opportunity to fully exploit, let alone improve upon existing rules. Instability and frequency of change in the area of leadership selection and types of management also affects Local Government ability to provide rural infrastructure.

Appointment of Transition Committee

The governors rather than allow elections to hold choose to appoint their party loyalists as Caretaker Committee members to manage the local government areas across the

country. By 1984, the military government that took over resorted to the use of sole administrators chosen among the civil servants. Between 1987 and 1993, elections were used again to select the leaders at this level. By 1994, sole administrators were reintroduced. Even elections held into the Local governments during General Sani Abacha's era were based on subjective criteria where candidates who did not share the aspirations of General Abacha and his cohorts were disqualified from contesting elections. This frequency of change in leadership also affects policies and implementation.

Lack of popular participation

Low level of people's participation in their own development constitutes a big challenge to rural infrastructure delivery. From the colonial period of Local government administration till date, much noise had been made about development from below, "Bottom up" approach to development, "popular participation" and other catch phrases to argue for people's involvement in the development (Sikuru, 2000).

Corruption

Also, there are problems of corruption, poor management; misappropriate and misapplication of the funds accruable to Local Government also affect infrastructure delivery at the grassroots. The Local Government is not free from corruption (ogbuene 2011).

Unqualified and Untrained Staff

Most Local government staff are unqualified and untrained in their respective fields which hampers their performance.

Theoretical Framework

Decentralization Theory

The theory of decentralization is adopted in this study. This is because development itself needs to be decentralized so as to achieve its purpose. The theory of decentralization explains the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to subordinate or quasi-independent government organizations and or the private sector (Oviasuyi&Idada, 2011; Riondelli, 1981; Haywood, 1997). It is concerned with how functions and responsibilities are given to different institutions from the central government for efficient and effective performance in terms of service delivery.

In the literature, two major forms of decentralization and devolution (Ogbuene, 2011). The former alludes to the transfer of state responsibilities and resources from the central to the periphery within the same administrative system. It indicates an internal form of delegation of responsibilities. On the other hand, devolution entails the transfer of specified responsibilities and resources to communities which are usually represented by their own lay or elected (i.e. none appointed) officials.

Adeyeye (2000) argued that in reality, devolution and decentralization are not mutually exclusive when implementing a decentralization programme, a balance of these elements is usually sought.

In the wake of widespread disenchantment with the centralized structure, transfer of some power and resources from the central to local government and organization has been advocated (Anifowose and Enemu, 2010).

For most African governments, however, decentralization is now viewed as a strategy for mobilizing local resources and initiative for national development. Since it has become

evident that federal or state governments alone cannot guarantee development in the rural areas, it then becomes imperative for power, authority and responsibility to be transferred from the central or state government to the local government for the purpose of enhancing development in the local areas. This is important because of the remoteness of the federal government to the rural people. It is believed that decentralization can therefore be viewed as an initiative to enhance rural development. It is encouraged by the need to improve service delivery to a large population and put in place meaningful structure to provide good governance at the local level. Local government in Nigeria is widely acknowledged as a viable instrument for rural development.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature review tries to deluge on the following issues as: the meaning of Local government and its features, functions of Local government, brief history of Anambra East Local Government, challenges of grassroots service delivery in Anambra East Local Government and theoretical framework. The study adopted decentralization theory which explains that development needs to go well with the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions.

Findings

Based on the challenges of grassroots service delivery in Anambra East, the study was able to make the following findings:

- Inability of the Local government to execute and maintain projects. Many projects have been abandoned while existing ones have dilapidated. This is because of the lean financial disposition of the local government as most of the revenue windows of the Local government including statutory allocations have been hijacked by the state government.

- The democratic nature of the Local government has been undermined by the persistent appointment of a caretaker committee by the governor. These caretaker chairmen are mere appendages of the state government.
- General corruption in the system; falsification of revenue receipts by revenue officers
- Laxity, truancy, inefficiency and poor attitude to work by staff who come to work once or twice weekly.
- Unqualified and untrained staff who falsify certificates backed up with court affidavits.

Conclusion

Local government cannot perform unless it is free from the financial and administrative entanglements of the state government. The excessive control of the Local government by the state government is a debilitating factor to the progressive and productive stance of the local government towards grassroots service delivery.

Recommendations

The following solutions are hereby made based on the findings of the study;

- The Local Government should be granted full autonomy both financially and administratively. The autonomy will enable her to have both financial and administrative capacities to embark on new projects and maintain existing ones towards effective grassroots service delivery.
- Democratically elected council officials should be entrenched with immediate effect to replace distasteful caretaker committees. This will enhance grassroots political participation and development.
- Adequate disciplinary measures should be adopted in the council to ensure effective control of the staff. Anti-graft agencies and other control bodies should be stationed in the Local government to monitor and control actions and movements.

- Staff training and retraining should be ensured. This will help to widen staff knowledge and thus prepare them for challenges presently and for the future.

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