

CHALLENGES CONFRONTING LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE SOCIAL SERVICE DELIVERY: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the challenges confronting local government administration in effective and efficient social service delivery at the grassroots. It presents an appraisal on Nigerian experience with the local government administration and the factors militating against local governments in providing social service at the local level. Secondary data formed the basis of data collection, interpretation and analysis. Data was collected through a comprehensive review of relevant literature on the subject of inquiry. The thrust of analysis was systematically prosecuted under select themes and sub-themes designed to address the salient aspects of the paper's objective. The paper identified lack of funds, corruption, and undue political interference amongst others as major constraints to local government service delivery. The paper provided some measures to ensure efficient and effective social service delivery at the local level. Such measures include constitutional reforms to ensure total autonomy of local government, enhance revenue allocation, capacity and institutional building that produce the human capital that is committed to the principles of good governance at local level. The paper concludes that if the above measures are employed, local governments in Nigeria would improve in the provision of essential social services to the people at the local level.

Keywords: Efficiency, Effectiveness, Grassroots, local Government, Service Delivery

INTRODUCTION

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 at the grassroots. 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).

Modern local government administration in Nigeria began during the British colonial rule. But then 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). The efficient and effective provisions of basic amenities and social infrastructures for the people at the grassroots are key factors to the existence of any government. Local government in modern day life is responsible for delivering basic services to the grassroots (its local communities) in efficient and effective manner but its inefficiency and ineffectiveness

in addressing the primary needs and wants of the people at the grassroots has made the thirds tiers of government irrelevance in the administration of the country lowest tiers of government to the people (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.

OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The aim of this paper is to critically examine the nexus between local administration and efficient social service delivery. Specifically, the study seek to interrogate the state of service delivery at local government, the challenges to service delivery at the local government, the prospect of efficient and effective service delivery at the local government.

Obasi (2000) holds that the value of any research is determined by its contributions to the existing body of knowledge in the field of the study. This study will make contributions to, and advance knowledge on the issues of efficient and effective social service delivery at the grassroots. The study will guide both members of the public, the academia, local government administrators on the need and how to efficiently deliver public goods to the citizens, factors influencing service delivery and how social service delivery can be improved in Nigerian local government administration. Again researchers in the field of Local Government Studies and Public Administration will find the paper an educative and resource material.

To achieve the aim of this study, secondary data formed the basis of data collection, interpretation and analysis. Data was collected through a comprehensive review of relevant literature on the subject of inquiry. The thrust of analysis was systematically prosecuted under select themes and sub-themes designed to address the salient aspects of the paper's objective.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The conceptualization of the term "local government" has been problematic; this is because there is no unanimous acceptable definition of local government among the scholars of local government and public administration. However, Kyenge (2013) posits that the concept of local government has been given various definitions by various scholars but no matter how differently the concept is defined, it focuses on the transfer of political powers to local areas by involving the inhabitants in the provision of basic needs in their respective communities. At this juncture, it is imperative to note the definitions of some of these scholars in the subject matter.

Specifically, local government is a unit of government below the central, regional or state levels established by law to exercise political authority through a representative council within a defined geographical area (Olisa, et al 1990) quoted in (Chukwuemeka et al., 2014). Appadorai (1975) defines local government as government by popularly elected bodies' charges with administration and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place. The International Encyclopaedia of social sciences (1976), defines Local Government as "A political sub-division of national or regional government which performs functions which nearly in all cases receive its legal power from the national or regional government but possess some degree of discretion on the making of decisions and which normally has some taxing powers.

As noted in the works of Adeyemi (2012), Achimugu, Stephen & Agboni (2013), Chukwuemeka et al., (2014), the Nigeria 1976 Guideline for Local Government Reform defines local government as: Government at the local level --- established by law to exercise specific powers within defined area (and) to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and to ensure that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized.

The United Nations Office for Public Administration quoted in Ola and Tonwe (2009), Ubani (2010), Achimugu, Stephen & Agboni (2013) defines local government as thus:

A political subdivision of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such as entity is elected or otherwise locally selected.

In addition, local government is seen as a system of government whereby the state allows the establishment of local units of government with powers and authority to make local decisions on matters that affect the local communities and to mobilize local resources for implementation or execution of the decisions made (Eboh & Diejomaoh, 2010).

The aforementioned definitions by various scholars above clearly show that local government is a multi-dimensional concept. However, The main features of these definitions of local government are noted in the works of Maddick (1963), Mawhood (1983), Tumini (2011), Ezeani (2012) and Chukwuemeka et al.(2014), Otinche (2014). These features include the facts that a local government:

1. Operates within a defined geographical area
2. Has certain population living within the confines of a defined territory
3. Operates at the local or grassroots level.
4. Has a range of constitutionally delineated functions to perform
5. Has a relative autonomy or independence.
6. It is a legal entity of its own and can sue and be sue.
7. Has its council composed of elected representatives.
8. It is the lower level government in a unitary political system and lowest level government in a federal three-level government.

Thus, local government in Nigeria context is established as the third tier of governance, protected by the constitution, which comprise of democratically elected representative whose purpose is to provide basic services to the people at the grassroots (Adeyemi, 2013). In a federal system of government like Nigeria, local government is usually the third tier of government. In a unitary system, like Britain, it usually exists as the second order government to the national level. However, what the local governments have in common, either in federal or unitary systems of government, is responsibility for the most immediate needs of their citizens without any other body between them and the individual. In other words, it is the order of government closest to the people (Chukwuemeka et al., 2014).

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: LOCAL GOVERNMENT CREATION AND SERVICE DELIVERY

According to Nchuchuwe and Oviasuyi (2003) many authors as well as schools have posited that there is no one theory of local government but rather the formulation of any theory on local government will be based on the functions of the aspect being studied. However, different theories or models of local government that underpins the existence of local government or that serve as explanatory frameworks for the establishment, purpose, function and philosophy of local government have been developed by scholars in the field of public administration and local government studies. Such models include: Democratic-participatory model, efficiency-services model and developmental model.

The three models or schools of thought are relevant to performance, function and existence of local government. Theoretically speaking therefore, Local Government is expected to enhance achievement of democratic ideals, political participation, protective services and infrastructural services like provision and maintenance of health facilities and institutions (Achimugu, Stephen & Agboni, 2013). However, in this paper attempt is made to examine efficiency- service delivery model which states that the principal focus of local government should be the provision of services. This model is important in this study because it captures the aim and imperative of this paper. The efficiency – service theory posits that local government exists to provide services, and it must be judged by its success in providing services up to a standard measured by national inspectorate (Mackenzie, 1954 cited in Ola and Tonwe, 2009).

The central point of the efficiency-service model is that the primary purpose of the local government systems is to provide social services such as law and order, local roads, primary education, sanitation and others efficiently (Chukwuemeka et al., 2014). According to Kafle and Karkee (2003) the core argument of the efficient-service delivery school is that local government exists to help to ensure efficient-service delivery. The leading advocate of the efficiency service school William Machenzie (1954), quoted in Adeyemo (2010) and Chukwuemeka et al., (2014) notes that service delivery to the local people is expected to pre-occupy the resources, power and time of the local government.

The proponents of the efficient service school argue that all is well even if there is less democratic participation in the governance process as long as the local or grassroots people get efficient services from the local government. This implies that local government, because of its closeness to an area, can provide certain service far more efficiently than the state or central government (Chukwuemeka et al., 2014).

Generally, according to Eboh & Diejomaoh (2010) local governments worldwide are considered as strategic institutions for the provision of basic socio-economic, environment and other services. Their strategic vantage proximity to the grassroots makes them valuable and viable for providing effective and

efficient services required by the community. 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. Such functions should be allocated to the local governments with powers, resources and the necessary autonomy to handle them (Abutudu, 2011).

Indeed, national or regional government will not be able to provide all the essential social services needed at the grassroots, thus it is the function of local government to effectively and efficiently provide social services at the local level. In the Nigerian context, such functions of local government include: Collection of rates, radio and television license; establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds and homes for the destitute or infirm; Licensing of bicycles, trucks (other than mechanically propelled trucks), canoes, wheel barrows and carts; establishment, maintenance of and regulation of slaughter houses, slaughter slabs, markets, motor parks and public conveniences; construction and maintenance of roads, streets, street lightings, drains and other public highways, parks, gardens, open spaces etc., (Bolatito and Ibrahim, 2014; Chukwuemeka et al., 2014). In sequel to the above, Chukwuemeka et al., (2014) posits that:

It is, to a large extent, the zeal and need to reposition the local government for greater and more effective service delivery that perhaps provides the impetus and imperative for the various local government reforms in most political systems. In Nigeria, for instance, there have been various local government reforms to strengthen the capacity of the local governments to deliver services effectively and efficiently to the local and grassroots people. This is why the local governments usually takes the blame where local roads are bad, where there are no market stalls, no functional motor park, no health centres, no portable water, no drugs in local dispensaries and where refuse is littered around the places.

The import of the foregoing is that local governments are established to provide appropriate and efficient services to the local community. In other words, local governments were created in Nigeria as a third tier of government to ensure responsive, efficient and effective social service delivery to the local communities.

THE EVOLUTION AND NATURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NIGERIA

Local government system has undergone three phases in Nigeria. These are: pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial phases. In the pre-colonial phase, different traditional systems of government existed which were adequate to satisfy the political needs of the different ethnic groups at that time (Okoli, 2000). These traditional political systems were considered as a form of local government created by ethnic groups – Hausa/Fulani, Ibo, Yoruba, etc for the provision of social services to meet the needs of the people within their domains ((Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013). The second phase was the establishment of Native Authority by the colonial government. It was meant to adapt to purposes of local government structures already present in the institutions of the various ethnic groups. The Native Authority was charged with the collection of taxes, maintenance of law and order, road construction and maintenance, and sanitary inspection, especially in township areas (Ukiwo, 2006; Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013; Eboh & Diejomaoh, 2010).

The third phase took effect from the Nigeria's independence of 1960. This phase was characterized by a multi-tiered local government structure in the Eastern and Western regions where both elected and traditional elements were accommodated (Agagu, 2004; Ukiwo, 2006; Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013). At this period different states operated different systems of local government. However, local government administration took a new dimension in 1976 local government reforms initiated by the Obasanjo led military government. The 1976 local government reforms 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 reforms also introduced population criterion under which a local government could be created. Consequently, a population of within 150,000 to 800,000 was considered feasible for a local government. This was done to avoid the creation of non-viable local council and for easy accessibility. There was provision for elective positions having the chairmen as executive head of local government with supervisory councilors constituting the cabinet (Eboh & Diejomaoh, 2010).

The reform was a major departure from the previous practice of local government administration in Nigeria (Oviasuyi, Idada & Isirajie, 2010). It formed the foundation of the present-day local government system in Nigeria in terms of structure, composition, functions, finance and democratic

existence. Thus the reform equipped local governments with political, administrative and fiscal capabilities for service delivery to rural communities (Imuetinyan, 2002; Ukiwo, 2006; Oviasuyi, Idada & Isiraojie, 2010). Subsequently, the main tenets of the 1976 reform were incorporated in the 1979 Constitution and 301 local government areas were listed in the Constitution (Eboh & Diejomaoh, 2010; Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013). The Babangida military government increased the number of local governments from 301 in 1976 to 453 in 1989, and 589 in 1991. The Abacha regime also increased the number to 774 local government areas in 1996 (Ajayi, 2000) quoted in (Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013).

The 1976 local government reform was also modified and enshrined in the 1999 constitution of Nigeria. The 1999 constitution ensures that the local government consolidates the tripartite system of government (made up of executive, legislature and judiciary) at grassroots level (Eboh and Diejomaoh, 2010). Executive powers are vested in the chairman, vice chairman, supervisor or supervisory councilors, as well as the structure of local government bureaucracy. The legislative functions are meant to be performed by the councilors, who represent the wards which make up the Local Government Area. The judiciary on the other hand, is streamlined with the federal and state and the local government can avail itself of the judicial process available to it (Eboh and Diejomaoh, 2010).

At present Nigeria is a federation comprising three tiers of government -the federal government, 36 state governments, federal capital territory (FCT) and 774 local governments (Eboh and Diejomaoh, 2010). As such, the local government system in Nigeria operates within the “presidential model”. The Chairman of the local government area is directly elected by electorates in the local government area, and governs in collaboration with the legislative arm of the local government. Local council members are also elected from single member wards (i.e. districts). The term of both the chairman and council of the local government areas is currently three years, but varies from state to state, depending on what has been legislated by the State House of Assembly (Eboh and Diejomaoh, 2010).

SERVICE DELIVERY AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Service delivery refers to the provision of social or public goods that will promote socio-economic well-being of the citizens. Public services offered by government are numerous and may include the provision of public utilities, security, economic development projects, and the enforcement of the law and so on. The delivery of public goods and services at the local government level or the grass root is aimed at moving the standard of living of the populace to the next level (Angahar, 2013).

Consequently, the efficient and effective provisions of basic amenities and social infrastructures for the people at the grass root are key factors to the existence of any government (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014). In sequel to the above, the Nigerian constitution assigns service delivery responsibilities to the three tiers of government with states and local government playing the most significant role in the delivery of basic services. Some of the services expected from local government authority include education, health, housing, water, rural electricity, waste disposal services, roads, transport, and so on (Adeyemi, 2013; Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013). Thus local government councils are required to serve the public interest in areas of constructing roads, public markets, healthcare centres, drainages, transportation, motor parks, building primary schools, among others (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014).

In support of this position, Agba, Akwara, & Idu (2013) contends that as agents of rural development, local governments are to use funds made available to them by both federal and state governments and their internally generated revenue to improve on the lives of the people within their areas of operations through initiating and attracting developmental projects to the local government such as provision of access roads, water and rural electricity. Apart from being a viable political and administrative organ for the transformation of rural communities, local governments also act as the training ground for the breeding of the grassroots democracy fundamental in national development (Adeyemo, 1995; Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010).

Sadly, Nigerian local governments have not been up and doing in terms of efficient and effective social service delivery to the grassroots. This is evident in the poor environmental state, deteriorating public school building, poor market facilities and lack of health centers (Olusola, 2011). The provision of basic social services such as education and health, as well as maintenance of roads and public utilities within the jurisdictions of local government is now both a myth and mirage (Agba, 2006). The failure of local governments in service delivery was expressed by ex-president Obasanjo in 2003. He lamented that:

What we have witnessed is the abysmal failure of the local government system. It is on record that at no time in the history of the country has there been the current level of

funding accruing to the local governments from the federation account, yet the hope for rapid and sustained development has been a mirage as successive councils have grossly under-performed in (their assigned responsibilities). Almost all the areas of their mandate..., yet the clamour for the creation of more local government areas have not abated” (Obasanjo, 2003).

The above observations apparently show that local government has not really facilitated rapid development at the grassroots, which is the essence of their creation (Amaechi, 2012). 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 questions; what could be the factor or factors responsible for the failure of local governments in efficient and effective social service delivery at the grassroots? The answers to this question will be explored in the next section.

Factors Affecting Service Delivery at the Local Government

An in-depth examination of local government performance in Nigeria reveals that local governments have 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 in a study conducted by Bello-Imam and Roberts (Bello-Imam and Roberts, 2001). These factors include: (a) revenue inadequacy (b) the erosion of local functions particularly in the revenue yielding areas by state governments and their agencies (c) politico-administrative problems such as inadequacy of skilled and technical manpower, lackadaisical attitude of existing local government staff, official corruption, variable structures/sizes of local government among others, and (d) lack of integration of the relevant communities in the execution of local services. Also some scholars in the field of public administration and local government studies identified the following factors affecting service delivery at local government administration in Nigeria 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). Some of these factors will be discussed below.

Lack of funds- financial constraints: For local government to effectively provide essential services at the grassroots, enabling environment most especially funds must be available to carry out its assigned responsibilities. In Nigeria, aside from other common problems, non provision of enough funds to local government has hindered effective performance by the local council (Ibok, 2014). Ibok (2014) pointed out that:

Aside from the fact that statutory allocations and grants from the federal and state governments to councils are inadequate, the problem is exacerbated by the low revenue generation capacity of the council. Associated with this problem is also exacerbated by frequent sundry deductions by the federal and state governments from their monthly allocations. Worst still is failure of most state governments to fulfill their monthly statutory obligations to local government by outright refusal to remit 10% internally generated revenue accrued to the state monthly. In some situations, it has become so bad that many local councils cannot pay staff salaries not to talk about basic need provisions”.

These financial constraints account for the inadequacy of fund in the local government administration in Nigeria and they inhibit the efforts of local council to provide better, efficient and effective social services to the grassroots.

Corruption: Corruption has been identified as one of the problems confronting effective local government administration in Nigeria (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014). Corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigeria local councils and it is the greatest bane of local government administration in Nigeria. Bolatito & Ibrahim (2014) pointed out that:

At the grassroots level, corruption has been canonically accommodated, entertained, and celebrated within the system. In the local government setting corruption is Misnomer labeled and euphemistically referred to as “Egunje” (a slogan which means “illegal offer” in Nigeria) and a major hindrance to good government.

The inability of local governments to provide services to the people at the grassroots has been linked to high levels of corruption among local governments' officials (Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013). There have been glaring cases of embezzlement and misappropriation of the councils' funds by the official of the council (Ibok, 2014). For instance, in February 2010, the chairman of Ijebu East Local Government Council in Ogun State was suspended from office on account of various financial misdeeds. Similarly, in April 2010, the House of Assembly in Benue State suspended 12 council chairmen in the state and directed that the chairmen should refund a total of 150 million naira being financial misdeeds associated with the excess crude funds received by local governments in the state (*National Mail* cited in Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013).

Generally, wide-scale embezzlement by officials of the grassroots has made the needed development of the grassroots a tall dream and has rendered them financially incapable to discharge their constitutionally assigned responsibilities. These unethical conduct has rendered local council financially impotence, hence incapable of providing basic needs to it citizens (Eboh & Diejomaoh, 2010; Ibok, 2014). Unarguably, Chukwuemeka et al., (2014) stressed that the high level of corruption in the local government makes it difficult for them to channel even the available scarce resources towards development projects and programs. Specifically, corruption in the local government system in Nigeria, manifests, for instance, in the award of inflated and fictitious contracts, award of contracts and subsequent abandonment, over estimation of cost of projects, inflation of staff salary, Inflation of prices of bought items, fraudulent sale of government property, outright embezzlement of local government fund, payment of huge sums of money to political godfathers and lack of accountability (Bolaito & Ibrahim, 2014; Chukwuemeka et al., 2014).

The import of the foregoing is that apart from financial constraints, corruption constitutes a major obstacle on the effectiveness of local government service delivery.

Undue political interference – lack of autonomy: Another reason for the failure of local government in area of services delivery is the role of the state governors in the affairs of local government (Adeyemi, 2013). According to Eboh & 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 found of taking over their financial allocation, taxes, counterpart funding and refuse to conduct Local Government elections, but instead ruling local governments with appointed administrators, most of whom are party loyalist and their friends and relations turning the entire process of local governments into irrelevance schemes of things (Ukongu 2012). There have been instances where state governors unconstitutionally dissolve the entire elected council's officers without proper recourse and due process (Eboh & Diejomaoh, 2010). As soon as a new governor comes into office, one of the first actions is to dissolve the existing local councils, whether elected or care taker (Abutudu, 2011). This, as the recent case of Imo State demonstrates, can degenerate into anarchy, with claims of legitimacy between rival appointees or elected officials. The staff of the councils invariably finds themselves caught in the middle (Anyanwu and Okara, 2011). In many cases, care takership is perpetuated through promises of elections which are invariably postponed. This has been the case in Edo, Delta and others (Abutudu, 2011). 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 of conducting local government elections. For instance, as at 2009, Anambra state had not held any local council elections since the return to civil rule in 1999 (Nkwocha, 2009). The high level of interference by state governors on local government affairs was also expressed by Khaleel quoted in John (2012); Adeyemi (2013) 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 government from effective functioning on one hand, 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 or appendages of state governments (Eboh & Diejomaoh, 2010; Ajibulu, 2012). The inherent nature of this problem, according to Adeyemi (2013) has caused subservience, a situation where local government waits for the next directives from states government before embarking on any developmental projects. This has made local government an object of control and directives.

The import of the above is that there are different dimensions of interference by state governors on local government administration in Nigeria. The first is the fiscal interference by the state governors? This problem stems from the fact that the Nigerian constitution did not totally grant financial autonomy to the local governments. For instance, the 1999 constitution of Nigeria did not adequately provide for the financial autonomy of the local governments as it subordinates them to the states through the provision, in section 162, paragraph 6, for the establishment and operation of State Local Government Joint Account (Chukwuemeka et al., 2014). This provision does not allow for the direct funding of the local government from the federation account and various research findings have shown that state governments manipulate this constitutional provision to keep the local governments as their 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 did not provide adequately for the political autonomy of the local governments in Nigeria. For instance, it did not provide specifically for the constitution of the local government council to be solely through democratic elections, for the specific tenure of the local government political office holders, for the local governments to derive their full existence directly from the constitution of the federal constitution and for the specific powers and functions of the local government (Chukwuemeka et al., 2014). The resultant effects of these lapses or inadequacies are that the state governments have 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).

THE WAY FORWARD: PROSPECT OF EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

As observed by Agagu (2004), the need to catalyze balanced development, maximize citizens' participation, and stimulate government responsive service delivery necessitates the creation of the local government. Local government as the closest unit of government to the people at the grassroots is expected to play significant roles in providing the social services. However, as a result of numerous factors enumerated above, local governments have been inhibited to effective and efficient social service delivery to grassroots. Consequently, the paper would highlight some measures that would improve social service delivery at the local government. These measures include;

1. Constitutional Reforms to Ensure Total Autonomy of Local Government: Reforms are needed to increase the fiscal and spending autonomy of local governments and minimise the interference and control of state governments (Eboh & Diejomaoh, 2010). The undue interference of the state governors should be eliminated to allow the council heads to govern and manage their natural resources using appropriate planning standards; opportunity to design appropriate policies, programmes and project suited to peculiar areas; preservation of cultural heritage of communities; and effectively delivery of democratic dividends to the grassroots (Amaechi, 2012; Adeyemi, 2013). Eboh & Diejomaoh (2010) asserts that:

Even though the local government is commonly referred to as the third-tier of government, it is debatable whether it truly qualifies as third-tier of government. This is because the local governments do not have the full compliments of a full three-arm government, like federal and state governments. There is therefore need for constitutional reforms to provide unique guarantees for the autonomy and powers of the local government. Alongside, institutional reforms are important to clarify and align local governments' roles and responsibilities in a manner that earns public confidence, intergovernmental credibility and unequivocal accountability.

Autonomy would pave way for rapid development at the grassroots (Oke, 2013). To ensure responsive governance, local government executive must be elected by the people and not superimposed by the ruling party or state governor. Elections at specific intervals should be conducted into the local government

council and with outright prohibition of any other alternative arrangement to administer the local governments (Ibok, 2014; Chukwuemeka et al., 2014).

2. Curtailing Corrupt Practice in Local Government Administration: To stem corruption and embezzlement, all financial transaction of the council must be audited and publicized. There should be monitoring and evaluation unit aim at measuring efficiency and effectiveness (Ibok, 2014). To ensure accountability and transparency in local government administration, the civil society organizations should also monitor the performance of local government officials and report any found wanting to anti-corruption agent. The anti-corrupt agencies like the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFFCC) should intensify their efforts at tackling the problem of pervasive corruption in the local government system. Government could further assist in this direction by introducing more effective anti-corruption clauses and fraud detecting mechanisms as well as ensuring the conduct of free and fair elections through which people could only get into power on the basis of their perceived honesty and ability to deliver democracy dividends to the rural and grassroots people (Chukwuemeka et al., 2014).

3. Adequate Financial Allocation to the Local Governments: Lower levels of government must have legal authority to raising needy revenue to support its expenditure requirements. Thus, the fiscal relationship between the center and lower - levels of government must be clearly worked out on the basis of equality, fairness and justice (Ekpo, 2008). Local governments should have direct and unfettered access to the statutory allocations from the Federation account and their share of the internally generated revenue. State government should be compelled to relinquish their 10% internally generated revenue to the local council to avoid their overdependence on statutory allocation. Thus, the provision for the State Local Government Joint Account should be expunged from the constitution and also the statutory allocation from the federation account should be increased from the present 20 to 30 percent (Abutudu, 2011; Chukwuemeka et al., 2014; Ibok, 2014). On the other hands, the internal revenue generation sources of the local government should be enhanced by way of investment in profitable ventures. The internal revenue base can also be enhanced, if rural inhabitants are properly educated on their civic responsibilities to support their local governments financially, by paying their taxes and rate promptly (Adeyemi, 2013).

4. Capacity Building – Institutional and Human Resources: There should be capacity building for local councils to take advantage of modern tools of local governance that are being developed world wide. This must combine the political and administrative cadre of the councils (Abutudu, 2011). Building institutional and system capacity that produces the human capital that is committed to the principles of good governance briefly summarized as transparency, accountability, honesty, foresightedness, equity, justice, prudent management of public funds, strong leadership inspired by vision and direction that is beneficial to the masses (Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013). According to Eboh & Diejomaoh (2010) the capacity building programme should be two-dimensional. The first is institutional strengthening – with respect to the various organs, departments, units and relationships and operational matters. This should involve training and orientation in policy development, monitoring and evaluation, public participation, public service delivery, social mobilization and government collaboration with the private sector. The other dimension is human resources upgrading – including training and education of staff to enhance their knowledge, skills and competencies. The working environment should be upgraded to attract higher quality well motivated staff.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to examine the challenges confronting local government administration in social service delivery with particular reference to Nigerian local governments. The paper captioned the conceptual framework of local government, theoretical perspectives on the function and creation of local government, service delivery at local government, factors affecting service delivery at the local government and the measures in which the identified challenges militating against local government performance can be curbed. The essence of creation of local governments all over the world is to provide effective and efficient social services to the local people. However, most local governments in Nigeria have not fulfilled their constitutional functions in terms of effective and efficient service delivery at the local level due to a number of reasons such as inadequate finance, corruption, undue political interference and so on. Consequently, the paper provided the measures for curtailing corruption and enhancing both financial and

political autonomy of the local governments in Nigeria that would improve social service delivery at the grassroots.

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