

CHALLENGES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ON SOCIAL SERVICE DELIVERY IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA (1999-2018)

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ABSTRACT

The study re-examines the various challenges confronting local government in delivering expected social services to the local populace. The study employed both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through questionnaire and in-depth interviews from eighteen (18) selected local governments in south-western Nigeria. The findings established the existence of challenges such as: inadequate autonomy (89%), unfavorable political and fiscal structure (80%), Joint Allocation Account Committee (75%), poor Internally Generated Revenue (74%), lack of proper awareness and citizens participation in determining the kind of social service needed (67%) and lack of maintenance culture (77%) as major challenges confronting social service delivery in the southwestern local government of Nigeria between 1999 and 2018. The paper reaffirmed the existence of challenges confronting local government in delivering expected social service to the populace and highlighted some recommendations to overcome these challenges.

Keywords: Social Service Delivery, Local Government, Southwestern Nigeria.

Introduction

Local Government is better placed to deliver the much-needed services at the local level. Gboyega, (1987) and Ajayi, (2000) are of the opinion that there is not any disorder with respect to roles and functions of Local Government globally, and specifically to Nigeria. Local Governments were created in Nigeria as the third tier of government to ensure effective, measurable and efficient service delivery such as primary health facilities, primary education, housing, agriculture, water, rural electricity, roads, etc. with certain resources at their disposal. It is unfortunate that most of the populace at the local level does not have access to these essential services. This is in tandem with the assertion of Udoh (2005) that over two-thirds of Nigeria's population residing in local areas still lacks access to electricity and safe drinking water.

Prior to colonialism, the traditional institutions of various communities played major role in coordinating the populace in embarking on provision of essential services that are communally needed in a self-help approach such as constructions of bridges, clearing of footpath or road path, maintenance of rivers and wells for drinkable purposes, which constitute the general basis for local governance. The colonial era brought about a little shift to the maintenance of law and order which was being coordinated and supervised by the colonial officers with the help of traditional institutions. Toward the tail end of colonialism in the 1950s, Local Government became a regional affair with each of the regions designing its own structure which continued until military intervention in Nigerian politics in 1966. The Eastern and Western regions accorded more importance to issues of democratisation and political participation than the delivery of services to the people compared to the conservative north in Local Government administration (Akinbade, 2008).

The provision of essential social services such as health, education, water, roads and housing and some others has always been the responsibility of the Federal, Regional or State and Local Governments in Nigeria (Nwoba, 2015). Also, the local government has its mandatory or exclusive and concurrent functions which the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria stipulated clearly. Local Government is also seen as the most dependable vehicles for service delivery majorly because of their closeness to the people. Local government serves as most tangible form of government to many citizens and also a layer of government which have the most contacts in their everyday life due to its closeness to ordinary citizens. The essence of local administration anywhere in the world is that it represents the interest of ordinary citizens in the society. The standard of living of Nigerians, be it in rural or urban areas, are inevitably affected by activities of Local Government in provision (or otherwise) of essential services such as water supply, roads, health and educational services, etc.

The various challenges facing effective social service delivery in Nigeria Local Government system range from inadequate autonomy, financial crisis, incessant changes in policies and structures of Local Government, lack of maintenance culture, low level of people participation in governance at local level and corruption that had overwhelmed the government at the local level.

Majekodunmi (2013) concludes that local government in Nigeria need adequate autonomy that would facilitate their operations through effective service delivery. Fiscal problem has also remained one of the major problems facing public institutions in Nigeria, particularly the Local Government (Akindele & Olaopa, 2002). State Governments that are constitutionally required to fund Local Government councils; but instead, they use the provision Joint Account Allocation Committee (JAAC) to hold Local Governments hostage and practically denying the Local Government councils their financial autonomy (Okafor, 2010). Lawal (2014) asserts that political leaders at Local Government level are fond of embarking on new projects with little resources at their disposal rather than taking good care and maintaining the existing ones. They usually do this to boost their image and that of their political party to enable them to get political support from the populace. Maintenance culture is often neglected because embarking on the new project usually opens an avenue to divert the public fund to private use. Doing this would not be easy if they were to just maintain the existing projects. This is not peculiar alone to Local Government but also rampant in all tiers of governments in Nigeria.

Parts of the challenges confronting Nigeria local governments system include how to manage its structure to enhance efficiency at the grassroots. Furthermore, Alao, Osadeke and Owolabi (2015) also assert that Local Government in Nigeria has not been able to perform optimally because of the overbearing nature of the state government, which has consequently rendered the autonomy of the system relatively paralysed and turned Local Government to a mere appendage of state government. This manifested largely under democratic dispensations (1979- 1983 and 1999-till date). Majority of the state governments refused to conduct election into the local government council despite the fact that the Constitution guarantees democratic structure; only few times were election conducted, and in these few instances the state government usually stage-managed the election into the council to ensure that their party and their own handpicked candidates won the election, especially the Executive arm (Chairmanship) and the majority of the legislative arm (Councillorship), so that political leadership at the Local Governments are not responsive to the electorate but to the state government. Furthermore, corruption has also been identified as one of the parasites that militate against the infrastructural development in Nigeria society, be it Federal, State or Local Government. Also, there are other problems, such as of poor management and misappropriation of the funds accruable to Local Government (Lawal, 2014).

The resources of Local Government from the federation account were considered too profitable for state government to ignore. Moreso, the introduction of Joint Allocation Account Committee (JAAC) by the state government and having a way of coercing the Local Government to sign letters in support of this arrangement removes the fear of litigation. Local government operatives participating in the process were requested to submit the list of projects intended for execution while the state government award the contracts (Alao, Osadeke& Owolabi, 2015). Furthermore, the unreserved demand for the fund and unimagined expectations from the populace, especially the local political juggernauts who expect the council to meet their personal needs at the expense of developmental needs, eventually constitute distractions for Local Government leadership in balancing the governor's demands and community's expectation. Adedokun (2012) clearly states that the political structure of Nigeria has contributed to the constraints of Local Government to mobilise and use the revenue to meet their obligations in a sustainable manner. He also notes that one of the recurrent problems of the third-tiered government in the country is the dwindling revenue generation as characterized by annual deficits and funds too insufficient for any meaningful growth and viable project development. Local Government is strategically located at the grassroots to play a pivotal role in national development (Adedokun, 2012). Hence, this study re-examines these various challenges confronting local government in delivery of expected social service especially in the areas of primary education and road constructions in southwestern Nigeria between the years 1999 and 2018.

Methodology

The study employed both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through questionnaire and in-depth interviews while secondary data were obtained from books and academic journals. Eighteen Local Government Areas were selected from Southwestern Nigeria using multi-stage sampling technique. The study population was 3,158 consisting of senior officers on grade levels 07-16 in departments of Works (478); Community Development and Information (CDI) (380); and Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) (144). Also, selected for the administration of questionnaire are traditional rulers (50); executives of Market Women Associations (90); executives of Nigeria Union of Local Government Employee

(NULGE) (126); executives of National Union of Road and Transport Workers (NURTW) (54); executives of Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) (144); executives of Parents Teachers Association/ Committee Based School Management Committee (PTA/CBSMC) (1134) and executives of Community Development Associations (CDAs) (558). The sample size for this study was 632, representing 20% of the total study population. In addition, a total number of 42 interviews were conducted with the following respondents in this order: One senior officer in the selected Local Government Areas (18); Association of Local Government of Nigeria (ALGON) Chairmen (3), Joint Account Allocation Committee (JAAC) member (3), traditional rulers (3), the State *iyalojas* (Head of market women) (3), the State NULGE Chairmen (3), the State NUT Chairmen (3), the State PTA/CBSMC Chairmen (3) and the State CDAs Chairmen(3). Data collected were analysed using frequency, percentage, mean value, and standard deviation.

Table: Analysis of the Challenges Confronting Effectiveness of Social Service Delivery in South-Western Nigerian Local Government between 1999 and 2018

S/N	Assertions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Response	Descriptive Statistics	
		f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	Mean Value	Standard Deviation
	i. Inadequate autonomy has constituted a major clog affecting the effective social service delivery in Nigeria Local Government system.	307 (53.9)	198 (34.7)	13 (2.3)	5 (.9)	4 (.7)	43 (7.5)	4.28	1.097
	ii. The political and fiscal structures of Nigeria have contributed to the challenges confronting local government in the delivery of primary education and road infrastructures in a sustainable manner at the local level.	234 (41.1)	217 (38.1)	26 (4.6)	33 (5.8)	13 (2.3)	47 (8.2)	4.10	.942
	iii. Incessant changes in policies and structure of Local government impact negatively on social service delivery	184 (32.3)	203 (35.6)	42 (7.4)	65 (11.4)	27 (4.7)	49 (8.6)	3.66	1.272
	iv. Local government funds have been siphoned by the state government	252 (44.2)	180 (31.6)	35 (6.1)	40 (7.0)	11 (1.9)	52 (9.1)	3.72	1.111
	v. Joint Allocation Account (JAAC) remains one of the major problems confronting the effective social service delivery in Nigeria local Governments.	260 (45.6)	168 (29.5)	48 (8.4)	34 (6.0)	11 (1.9)	49 (8.6)	3.49	1.409

vi.	Poor Internally Generated revenue by local government has a negative effect on the provision of social service especially in the areas of primary education and roads construction	204 (35.8)	218 (38.2)	17 (3.0)	60 (10.5)	25 (4.4)	46 (8.1)	3.24	1.473
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vii.	The local populace is not an active participant in determining the kind of social service needed	113 (19.8)	241 (42.3)	55 (9.6)	72 (12.6)	37 (6.5)	52 (9.1)	3.27	1.459
viii.	The absence of community ownership has contributed to the challenges facing the sustainability of social service in Nigeria Local Government	125 (21.9)	242 (42.5)	50 (8.8)	72 (12.6)	33 (5.8)	48 (8.4)	3.43	1.372
ix.	There is a lack of proper awareness about whose tier of government is responsible for projects between the state and local Government especially in primary education and roads construction	169 (29.6)	216 (37.9)	29 (5.1)	71 (12.5)	37 (6.5)	48 (8.4)	3.26	1.349
x.	Lack of maintenance culture has been a major bane confronting social service delivery in Nigeria Local government.	187 (32.8)	254 (44.6)	23 (4.0)	38 (6.7)	19 (3.3)	49 (8.6)	3.84	1.208
xi.	There is a lack of constitutional adherence by the state government on the election and fiscal autonomy of local government which at large affect social service delivery	215 (37.7)	184 (32.3)	42 (7.4)	72 (12.6)	4 (.7)	53 (9.3)	4.16	1.006
xii.	Corrupt practices by Government officials has inevitably become a major clog in the provision of adequate social service at local government level	199 (34.9)	174 (30.5)	41 (7.2)	71 (12.5)	36 (6.3)	49 (8.6)	3.41	1.190

Source: Field Survey, 2018

To complement the data gathered through questionnaire administration, some key stakeholders were interviewed. Almost all the interviewees agreed to the fact that there are various challenges confronting the social service delivery in Nigeria local government. Their responses towards the challenges confronting delivery of social service by the local government for the populace range from inadequate autonomy of local government from state government, poor internal generated revenue of local government, lack of maintenance culture of the existing services and the last but not the least the level of corruption in public sector which includes local government.

In expatiating the inadequate autonomy of local government from state government, most of the interviewees describe the concept of autonomy in three major ways, which are financial, political and administrative autonomy. PTA/CBSMC Chairman in Ogun State affirmed that “appropriate power financially, politically and administratively has not been given to local government to operate on their own, instead they operate under the command of state government.” Director of CDI in one of the local governments selected also confirmed that “the state government is the first challenge, as they do not provide enough funds for the operation of local government.” Also, a traditional ruler in Ekiti State also stated that:

one of the major problems of local government is the lack of funds, the money that supposed to come to the local government covers is not given to them, even the little given to them are not used wisely. Money accruing to them from federation account come to state government through the instrumentality of the JAAC, then after the JAAC meeting, little funds were allocated to them which are nowhere to be right home about in terms of provision of social service to the populace. (Field survey, 2018)

Almost all the interviewees agreed that one of the major challenges that are confronting local government in the delivery of the adequate service to the populace is the lack of financial autonomy. Most of the interviewees also confirmed that lack of political autonomy at the local

level constituted a major clog in the delivery of social service to the citizens. Ogun State NULGE Chairman stated that

state governments had crippled local government politically, financially and even administratively. Most of the state governments prefer to appoint a caretaker committee as the political leadership at the local governments in their various states against the provision of the 1999 constitution of the federal republic on Nigeria as amended which guaranteed democratically elected local government at all time. The government of the state prefers caretaker structure to that of elected structure because the governor appoints whoever he wants to direct them the way he wants, neglecting the wish of the populace. Even where there is local government election, the political party in control of that state or the ruling party of the state wins the entire local government Chairman seat, so as for governor to dictate the tune without many antagonists. This invariably affects the essence of localness in local governance and drastically affects the output of local government in the provision of essential social service to the populace. (Field survey, 2018)

Also, one of the Director of CDI in selected local government in Osun State and HOLGA in selected local government in Ogun State confirmed that lack of administrative autonomy of local government from state government is part of the major problem confronting local government in delivering social service at the grassroots. In the words of Director of CDI in selected local government in Osun State:

we have administrative problems, we cannot sit and take decision on our own, most of the times we take directive from state government, statutorily this department is supposed to go to the communities and ask for their needs, bring back our report that is supposed to form the basis for the policy we are going to formulate and implement, in those days community development officials are referred to rural extensions officers, when it comes to primary education we are to undertake and be in charge in

this department, we are supposed to go and liaise with other stakeholders, primary school what do you want and after telling us we will attend to it but the state had taken over even some administrative function of local government. For instance, this is a letter from a primary school that they need a hall, but we don't have funds, assuming we have funds, work supposed to have been started there, but what we are contemplating now is how we can partner with the P.T.A. (Field survey, 2018)

These described the fact that lack of proper autonomy financially, politically and administratively is the major challenges confronting the provision of social service delivery in Nigeria, particularly in southwestern Nigeria. Another area where most of the stakeholders interviewed shed more light on is the way the existing social infrastructure is being maintained. Ekiti State NULGE Chairman stated that:

the maintenance cultures of our infrastructures are very poor, the government provide services to the populace and most of the time turn their back to that provision without thorough and continuous monitoring, while on the other hand, the populace which is the users of the service do not even bother to sustain and maintain that infrastructure, any little fault, the infrastructure becomes useless and nobody cares about repairs. We have a lot of projects that cut across many areas i.e schools, boreholes, public toilets, street lightings, roads, even machinery like tractors, vehicles etc that has been abandoned due to a minor fault. (Field survey, 2018)

There is no proper synergy between service providers, that is, government and service users, which is the populace about the sustenance and maintenance of existing infrastructures.

Discussion of Findings

In analysing the challenges confronting social service delivery by Local Governments in southwestern Nigeria, most of the variables verified tended towards the strong confirmation of these challenges. These range from inadequate autonomy, political and fiscal problem, incessant changes in policies and structure, JAAC issues, poor IGR, lack of active participation, absence of

community ownership, bad maintenance culture and corruption. They all appeared to be major challenges confronting the provision of social service in southwestern Nigeria local governments especially between 1999 and 2018.

About 89% of the respondents agreed to the fact inadequate autonomy has constituted a major clog affecting social service delivery in Nigeria local government system. This statement is in tandem with the conclusion of Majekodunmi (2013) that the local government in Nigeria needs adequate autonomy that would facilitate their operations through effective service delivery. Most of the information gathered through interview toward this assertion also confirmed that inadequate autonomy has been a major problem affecting social service delivery in Nigeria local government system.

Akindele and Olaopa (2002) established that the fiscal problem had remained one of the major problems facing public institutions in Nigeria, particularly the local government. This assertion was reaffirmed with more than 80% of the respondents recognising political and fiscal structure as one of the major challenges of local government in the delivery of social service to the populace. More than 75% of the respondents affirmed that the activities of JAAC remain a concise problem facing the delivery of social service at the local level. This assertion also buttresses the position of Okafor (2010) that state government, that is constitutionally required to relate with local government in terms of funding through the provision of JAAC, have instead used the JAAC provisions to hold local governments hostage, and make them mere appendages of the state government. Also, Adedire (2014) corroborated this position by asserting that the activities of JAAC have made service delivery to suffer at the local level. Most of the interviewees also confirmed that the activities of JAAC have retarded the delivery of essential social service by local government to the populace. More so, 74% of the respondents confirmed that poor IGR by local government has a negative effect on the provision of social service to the populace. This assertion also corroborates the position of most interviewees that state government had hijacked the juicy areas where local government can effectively generate revenue internally.

Furthermore, more than 64%, 67%, and 77% agreed to the facts that local populace are not active participant in determining the kind of social service needed; absence of community ownership

has affected the sustainability of social service provided and that lack of maintenance culture has been a major bane confronting social service delivery, particularly at the local level respectively. These statements revealed that the three variables are more interrelated to each other, that is, most of the people at the grassroots (service users) do not really participate in determining the kind of service needed at their localities, but instead depend on whatever the governments (service providers) dish out to them, and this invariably affects the proper awareness of the people (service users) about which tier of governments (service providers) are responsible for social service delivered, and which would definitely affect the maintenance of such service. Lack of participation of service users in deciding the kind of projects or services needed from service providers would likely lead to lack of proper awareness of the users about any other project or service provided, and this would likely lead to lack of proper maintenance of such projects or services.

Lastly, more than 65% of the respondents confirmed that corrupt practices by government officials have inevitably become another clog in the provision of adequate social service at the local government level and the findings are in tandem with the position of Lawal (2014), amongst others, that problem of corruption, poor management, misappropriation and misapplication of the funds accruable to local government affect social service delivery at the grassroots. The findings established and reaffirmed the existence of challenges that confront social service delivery, especially in the areas of primary education, and construction and maintenance of roads in the Southwestern local governments of Nigeria, between 1999 and 2018.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study established and reaffirmed the existence of challenges and problems confronting social service delivery especially in the areas of primary education and construction of roads in southwestern local government of Nigeria between the years 1999 and 2018 which range from; inadequate autonomy, political and fiscal problems, lack of citizens participation, lack of maintenance culture and corruption, among others. These various challenges need to be holistically tackled for the people at the local level to enjoy the necessary service delivery from their government.

Recommendations

- Undue interference from the higher government should be reduced, though State Government has the power to supervise their activities but not to be controlling them, there is certain and clear autonomy for Local Government to perform their specific functions to local populace without the interference of any other tier of government.
- Percentage of Local Government funds should be increased from Federation account to have enough resources to provide essential infrastructure for the local populace.
- Democracy and good governance should be fully instituted at the grassroots level in compliance with section 7(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria where the government at the Local Government level would be elected leadership which would be accountable to the electorates and not the appointee of the State Government which turned to be stooges of state government.
- Godfatherism should be discouraged if not totally abolished so as to allow the elected leaders to be accountable and be held responsible by the people who elected them.
- The maintenance culture of the existing infrastructural facilities has been identified as one of the challenges facing Local Government, maintenance culture must be imbibed by the leadership of Local Government and continuity should also be encouraged which is one of the characteristics of government.
- Leaders should desist from engaging in corrupt practices. Anti-corruption war must be extensively extended to Local Government and not just the Federal Government alone.
- Local Government must also have a solid plan in terms of revenue and expenditure, recurrent and capital expenses, the priority must be well defined, and the plan must be vigorously pursued.
- Involvement of the citizenry in the formulation and implementation of policies should be encouraged.
- If there is going to be adequate provision of essential socio-infrastructure at Local Government level, there must be a necessary improvement in the internally generated revenue of local governments.

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