**Local Government and Rural Development in Nigeria: The Nexus.**

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## Abstract

Local Governments are basically created to effect rural development and bring grassroots communities closer to the government. Many scholars assume and expect that previous local government reforms would improve rural development. However, there are significant critiques of this viewpoint. This study explores some challenges of local governments to effect rural development in Nigeria in spite of series of reform measures. The study examined some approaches for rural development. Findings of the study indicate that Local Government autonomy, inadequate funding and mismanagement are the major challenges of local government to effect rural development in Nigeria.

Key words: Local Government, Nexus, Rural Development.

## INTRODUCTION

Local Governments are basically created to effect development at the rural community level and reduce over dependence on central government. In essence, Local government is essentially a third tier of government established to bring government closer to the people at the grass roots level, with the aim of providing some basic infrastructural facilities. Local governments are therefore essentially created to bring rural populace closer to the government. Local government as an institution is considered as the best institutions that promote wider participation of the grassroots communities in taking decision on their local affairs. Because of being closer to the rural communities, Local government is placed in a better position to bring about development of the rural dwellers than any higher levels of government. It is therefore assumed that, Local government could bring about development to rural communities in a better, faster and efficient manner than either state or central government because of its closeness to the grassroots (Jamo, 2012).

Rural communities are the most downtrodden people with shortage of infrastructural facilities. In Nigeria, significant number of population resides in the rural areas. Studies indicate that about 70 per cent of the Nigerian population resides in the rural local governments (Otaki, 2005). This implies that if Local Governments are enhanced, there would be a significant improvement in lives of the Nigerian population will be preserved, unfortunately, Nigerian Local governments are bedevilled with numerous challenges which limited their performance to enhance the standard of living of the rural dwellers resulting in high rate of poverty, lack of infrastructural facilities, rural urban migration and high rate of criminal activities. This paper explores challenges of Local government in actualizing rural development. This paper contains four sections, the first is the introduction, the second is the review of challenges of Local Government to effect rural development, section three of the work explores some approaches of rural development and conceptualizes the concepts of rural development and Local Government, while section four provides findings of the study and draw conclusion based on the research findings.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper relies on secondary source. Materials were collated mainly from journals, conference proceedings as well as Ph.D. thesis. Findings of the study were thematically reviewed.

## CHALLENGES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

A growing body of scholarship explores challenges of local governments to effect rural development. A number of such scholarship focuses on different individual challenge, while others have articulated combination of such challenges. For instance studies indicate that, one major index of social change and development today is indeed rural development (Ighodalo et-al, 2012). Hence, the expediency for the creation of local government anywhere in the world stems from the need to facilitate development at the grassroots levels. The importance of local government is a function of its ability to generate sense of belonging, safety and satisfaction among its populace (Omatsola, 2011). This shows that the importance of local government in actualizing rural development is not overemphasized. But Ighodalo et-al, (2012) observes that while the basic rationale behind the creation of local government is to meet the peculiar needs of the people at the grassroots, it is however pathetic to note that local governments in Nigeria have demonstrated incompetence in achieving this objective. Similarly Jibitan (2010) in his study of the impact of local government on rural development in Nigeria, show that local governments have not been able to play their constitutional roles, due to lack of autonomy which has been usurped by the state governments. Though not empirical, but highlighted the main challenge of the Nigerian local governments in carrying out rural development agenda. While Daniel (2014) study examines the impact of LG administration on rural development in Enugu north LG and finds out that, finance and personnel are the main challenges of LG in rural development. In the case of finance, the author identifies inadequate sources of revenue generation as the main hindrance. Inadequate competent, skilled and educated staff has also been considered as another hindrance for Local

Government to actualize rural development. The study is an empirical analysis of the challenges of the Nigerian LGs in rural development. However, the study was silent on the scope of the study in terms of substance and period of the study. Supporting this position, Omatsola (2011) research proves that Warri North local government has not been effective in the development of rural communities due to poor internally generated revenue. As such the LG relied heavily on the Federal and State allocation which are not enough even to pay workers' salaries. Whereas Anger (2012) study shows that the present difficulties of having a genuine development at the rural areas in Benue state and indeed Nigeria are largely attributed to the inability of the local government to perform their statutory roles efficiently and effectively. The study related the present inadequate infrastructural facilities and other essential needs of the people in the state to poor performance of the LGs to carry out their constitutional functions effectively. But Lawal (2014) observes that rural infrastructure network is unavailable in the local areas and where it is available; it is severely degraded and inadequate for any meaningful development. While, Akpan (2006) focuses on the 1976 Local government reform and argues that, though the reform has achieved some of its objectives but failed to provide a suitable spatial framework for rural development.

It is clear from the above that, Local Governments in Nigeria suffers from different challenges which limit their performance to improve the living standard of the rural dwellers. These challenges include state interference into local government affairs and starving Local Government to expend expenditures on projects that have significant impact on the rural communities except within the area of it falls within the area of the interests of their respective state governments. Other challenges include mismanagement of public funds by these in the helm of affairs of the Local Governments. Finally lack of internally generated revenue by most Local Governments is another factor.

## APPROACHES TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT

This section highlights various approaches to rural development, such approaches reviewed include: Basic Resource Approach, Growth Centre Approach, Export-Led Growth Approach, Diffusion Model, Basic Needs Approach and Integrated Rural Development.

## BASIC RESOURCE APPROACH

This is one of the approaches adopted by the Colonial administration. The approach is premised on the assumption that development is a product of the existence of natural resources. In other words development depends on the availability of natural resources. Thus the exploitation of the natural resources in a particular area would lead to capital investment and automatically lead to higher economic activities, employment and income generation. It therefore assumes that areas blessed with basic natural resources grow faster than less endowed areas (Jibitan, 2010).

## GROWTH CENTRE APPROACH

The Growth Centre Approach is based on the argument that growth does not happen everywhere at the same time. But they begin from the centre and extend to hinterland.

In this approach, the centre facilitates development of the rural areas surrounding it by providing employment opportunities, consumption of rural labour force and raw materials.

## EXPORT-LED GROWTH APPROACH

This is the approach initiated by the colonial administration in order to produce cash crops for exports. It is expected that through this method, the rural areas will be opened up and linked through infrastructural facilities. The main idea behind this approach is that the opening into world markets resulting from international demand for products of the developing economies will eventually galvanise resource utilization and capacity building of the hitherto dormant and under-utilised resources and potentials. This explains the development of various ports, railways, roads across the length and breadth of Nigeria. It is

expected that this approach will increase personal incomes, employment and government revenues (Jibitan, 2010).

**DIFFUSION MODEL**

The approach is based on the assumption that there are differences in agricultural practices and that these differences account for the success or otherwise of farmers. The main argument of the model is that innovations to farmers require re-orientation through effective communication and other support services. In this regard farmers need to be educated on the application of modern techniques, equipment, improved seeds and inputs. The approach also emphasized availability and timely delivery of new inputs to farmers. It also emphasizes on the credit facilities to farmers.

**BASIC NEEDS APPROACH**

This approach assumes that, the rural population requires certain basic infrastructural facilities. Such infrastructural facilities include water supply, health facilities, roads, electricity, schools, communication facilities etc. DFRRI and other interventions are among the institutions established by the government so as to improve development of the rural communities on a continuing basis. The approach emphasizes on the welfare and development of the rural people and how to eliminate these constraints (Jibitan, 2010).

**INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

This approach is a reaction to the deficiencies associated with single project approach to rural development. The approach is based on the reason that previous attempts or approaches to rural development have failed due to lack of integration. It is a multi-project approach to rural development where sectors are integrated to one and the other. For instance, agriculture, infrastructure and industry support and reinforce each other.

It is also a multi-sectoral approach that attempts to resolve some policy contradictions and conceptual problems (paradox) of the past and previous approaches which yielded little or no results. The approach emphasized bottom-top approach to rural development so as to achieve desired objective. It also emphasized sectoral integration such as link between agriculture and industry, education, health and infrastructure so as to achieve rural development. This method also emphasized on organizational integration which involves coordination and collaboration of various institutions (for instance, financial institutions such as bank for agriculture etc) and other Governmental (i.e all levels and units of government) and Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (Jibitan, 2010).

**CONCEPTUALIZATION**

For clear understanding of the two concepts i.e. Local Government and rural Development, the need to conceptualize the two is necessary.

**CONCEPT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Local Government as a concept has attracted several definitions. Unlike other concepts, it has not generated controversy (Ighodalo and Sola, 2010). Appadorai (1975:287) defined LG as a government by a popular elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place. The definition restricted LG to government formed by a popular elected bodies charged with the responsibility of administering a particular area. Similar conception by the United Nation office for public Administration (1961:11) as cited in Ola (1984) views local government as ‘‘a political sub- division of the nation (or in a federal system, a state), which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the power to exert labor for prescribed purpose. The governing body of such entity is elected or otherwise locally selected’’. This definition further identifies another feature of the LG to include power to

exert labor at the local level. More elaborately, the guidelines for the 1976 local government reform define local government as a:

> Government at local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers 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, through the devolution of functions to these councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions that local initiative and response to local needs and condition are maximized (Local Government Reform, 1976).

The guidelines (1976:1) further specify the powers of Local Government as "Should give the council substantial control and financial powers 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 governments in their areas".

From the above definitions we can deduce the following:

i. Local Government officials are regularly elected or selected.
ii. Local Government must have a legal personality distinct from either a state or federal.
iii. Local Government must have specified power to perform a range of functions.
iv. Local Government must enjoy substantial autonomy.

Ola (1984:1) in a similar conception added that LG has the following features:

i. It is a sub- division of a nation (state or a nation-state).
ii. It can impose taxes and incur expenses.
iii. It exists within defined territory.
iv. It has its autonomous existence and legal identity.
v. It comprises elected members who run it.

In the context of this research, LG imply government created by law to perform some local functions. It also implies a third tier of government responsible for local affairs within its assigned authority to deliver services to the local people or communities.

In essence, among the characteristics generally manifested by local government include that it is a subordinate system of government or subunit of a federal/central or state government and charged with powers to perform legislative, administrative and quasi-judicial functions as the case may be. LG also has the power to formulate policies, prepare budgets and a measure of control over its own staff, with a view that it is rightly position to ensure unhindered and efficient service delivery (Alawo, 2015)**.** In similar view Chukwuemeka et al.(2014), Otinche (2014), Ezeani (2012) Tumini (2011) as well as Whalen (1970) note that LG has the following characteristics including a given territory and population, an institutional structure. it is separate legal identity, has a range of powers and functions authorized by delegation from the appropriate central or intermediate legislature. lastly within the ambit of such delegation, autonomy is accorded within its sphere of jurisdiction and competence (Alawo, 2015)**.**

The constitution specified the functions of LGs as follows:

a. Consideration and making of recommendations to the state commission on economic planning or any similar body on economic development of the State, particularly in so far as the area of authority of the Council and of the State are affected;

b. Collection of rate and radio and television licenses;

c. Establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds and homes for the destitute or in firm;

d. Licensing of bicycles, trucks (other than mechanically propelled trucks), canoes, wheel barrows and carts;

e. Establishment, maintenance and regulation of markets, motor parks and public conveniences;

f. Construction and maintenance of roads, streets, drains and other public highways, including parks, 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 and refuse disposal;

i. Registration of 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 and other places for sale of food to the public, and laundries.

The local government councils also work hand- in-hand with State governments on issues such as:

a. The provision and maintenance of primary education;

b. The development of agriculture and natural resources other than the exploitation of minerals, and

c. The provision and maintenance of health services.

It is clear that the 1999 constitution placed LG as a third tier of government and allocated certain functions to that tier.

**CONCEPT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Rural development is any plan effort aimed at improving and or enhancing the socio-economic livelihoods of the rural communities. It encompasses the transformation of lives of the rural commune so as to ensure a significant improvement in the quality of lives. Thorbecke et al (1992) added that rural development involves the following:

a. improving the productive potential of the rural commune through appropriate policy and institutional framework,
b. improving resource and technology support for the rural commune,
c. creating an enabling market environment for rural commune so as to raise their productivity on land where access to it is assured,
d. raise their income through off-farm income generating activities, where there is scope for generation of productive employment
e. preparing the rural people with the necessary skills that would permit them to explore other avenues and other activities.
f. decisions and responsibilities should be shared instead of imposing on the people

In a similar view Serageldin and Steeds (1997) outlined the following important considerations:

> The need to understand the rural people in their own context – their specific local conditions, felt needs, constraints and possibilities; The need to design, implement and evaluate activities with the rural people, not for them, because development is something people do, not something done for them; Channel resources to the rural people as directly as possible and allow them to manage those resources. This can be achieved through promoting an enabling institutional environment – one that fosters representative, decentralized, and participatory local governance in order to create the conditions which the rural populace can more effectively use their own talents and capabilities.

While Maboguje (1980:30) observes that "The main concern for rural development is the enhancement of the standard of living of the low-income earners of the rural communities through self-sustaining efforts of their productive activities". This entails comprehensive efforts to improve socioeconomic activities of the rural dwellers with the view to improve their income and quality of lives.

From this definition we can deduce the following (i) enhancement of the standards of living of the rural populace (ii) Mass involvement of the rural communities toward desired goal (c) Self-sustaining approach through involvement of the rural communities with the view of enhancement of their income and living condition.

Earlier, Lele (1975:18) suggests that, realization of above objectives depends on the following: (a) Effective national policies that ensures land tenure systems; commodity pricing and marketing systems; wages and interest rate structure (b) Removing administrative barriers which negate devolution of powers to the grassroots (c) Scope for institutional pluralism: This involve "devolution with the distribution of development responsibility among the normal government structures; semi-autonomous governmental institutions and structures, private, commercial and traditional institutions; and elective bodies". Similarly, Okoli and Onah (2002) viewed rural development as a strategic effort toward enhancing and transforming conditions of the rural communities through the mobilization of their human, natural and institutional resources with the aim at improving their capabilities to cope with their challenges. This means rural development encompasses a number of activities such as advancement of agriculture and other rural activities as well as increasing mass participation in the development process through proffer decentralization of structures, with the view to enhance living standards of the grassroots communities. Even though, the concept of rural development is complex, it is quite clear that the concept is a multidimensional phenomenon

which aims at improving the living condition of the rural populace. It is a form of socio-economic activities aimed at transforming the traditional sector.

**DISCURSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS**

It is clear that rural development programme has a multiple objectives. i.e. it is multi-sectoral in its objectives. Rural development agenda must involve different sectors such as agriculture, education, health, information, private sectors etcetera. Such multi sectors must also integrate together so as to achieve broad development at the rural areas. This can be achieved by connecting agriculture with industry, health, education and infrastructure.

Rural development involves the efforts of Nongovernmental Organisations (NGOs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) through bottom-top approach to rural development. It requires the participation and collaborative efforts between government and religious, traditional as well as private institutions such as banks etcetera. i.e. allowing such organizations to understand and articulate their problems and solutions.

The study found that lack of Local government autonomy is one of the challenging factors for rural development in Nigeria. The study indicates that in spite of the numerous reforms, constitutional provisions and other efforts to guarantee local government autonomy in Nigeria, Local governments in the country are suffering from encroachment by the state governments. This is framed in form of state Local Government joint account and joint project system. In most time Local Governments are denied power to expend expenditure on rural development projects that have direct impact on the lives of the rural communities unless it coincides with the interest of their state governments.

Study also proved that lack of sufficient revenue is one of the challenges for rural development in Nigeria. Available literature shows that lack of internally generated revenue placed a serious challenge to Local government performance in carrying out their

constitutional responsibilities. Most Local governments solely rely on federal allocated revenue (i.e. their share from the federation account). This coupled with the fact that, the federal allocated is not enough to cater for Local needs.

Mismanagement has also been considered as one of the challenges for Local Government to effect rural development. This study also found that, local government officials have been accused of mismanaging their limited revenues. In essence, studies indicate poor accountability and evidences of squandering public resources by local government personnel. This misconduct is usually in form of inflating or false award of contracts and “false vouchers”, or expending expenditures on projects that do not have direct impact on the rural communities.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although local governments in Nigeria were created to improve standard of living of the rural communities by bringing them closer to the government, experience of the past indicates that, in spite of the reform measures, Local government have not been performing their constitutional responsibilities due wide range of challenges including lack of financial autonomy to expend expenditure on their priority needs, mismanagement of their limited resources by some local government officials and lack of enhanced internally generated revenues. The study concludes that, the ability of local government to serve as a catalyst for rural development in Nigeria depends on the extent to which the above challenges are addressed. The study suggests adequate financial autonomy, enhancement of internally generated revenues and prudent management of public resources.

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