Local Government (LG) and the Challenges of Service Delivery in Nigeria: Exploring the Alternatives.

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Abstract

Among the reasons for creating Local Governments is to provide services at the grassroots level so as to reduce overdependence on state and federal governments. Studies indicate that, Local Governments performance in Nigeria has been below expectation in spite of several reform measures. While there are growing body of literature of the challenges of Local Governments in Nigeria, adequate attention on better alternative service delivery models have not been given. This work will fill this gap. Data were sourced from secondary source. Findings of the study revealed that insufficient funding, lack of autonomy, in adequate skills personnel, accountability and prudent management of resources deficit as well as corruption are among the most challenging factors hindering effective service delivery at the Local Government level. The study concluded that, decentralization service delivery model in Nigeria has been perfectively less effective in solving local demands due to massive corruption and mismanagement. Thus the study recommended collaborative/ partnership service delivery model so as to cater for the growing challenges of accountability and insufficient fund at the local level.

Key words: Local Government; Service delivery, Alternatives, Challenges.

Introduction

Local Governments are essentially created to deliver services at the grassroots level so as to ensure developments across all levels of society and these services cut across all parts of the country by bringing governed closer to the government. This division of governmental power simplifies governmental activities and serves as a viable incentive for good governance and development. It also serves as an effective avenue for delivering basic goods and services to local communities in faster, easier and efficient manner (Pradeep, 2011:4; Nwosu, 2011:118).

Local Governments (LGs) in Nigeria occupy an important position as enshrined in the constitution and designed to be part and parcel of the federation, for instance, sections two

and three of the 1999 constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria placed the LG as the third tier of government in the country. While the Fourth Schedule of the 1999 Federal Government Constitution. Section 7(5) of the constitution listed and empowered the Councils to perform essential function of service delivery. To make them functions effectively, the percentage of the LG revenue from the federation account continues to increase from 10% to in 1989 to 20% in 1992, and finally to 20.60% in 2008.

However, in spite of the above measures, studies indicate that LGs performance is below expectation. Most of the reasons advanced by the LG councils in Nigeria were lack of autonomy and inadequate funding. Hence, with the reform measures and the eventual increase in LGs share from the federation statutory allocation and the increase in LGs' revenue, the expectation of many people was that such excuses supposed to have been resolved. Yet services are still inadequate. This study explores the challenges of LGs and provides service delivery alternatives.

Data in this study were sourced from the secondary source and systematically reviewed. The study covered the period of the present democratic dispensation due high influx of revenue from the federation account. The study only covers issues surrounding LGs challenges in Nigeria. The paper is divided into four sections; the first is the introduction, followed by the literature review in the second section. The third section is the findings of the study. Section four is the last not the least which draw conclusion and recommendations.

Literature Review

There are quite a numerous scholarship contributions on the challenges for LGs in Nigeria with regards to service delivery (Oladimeji, Kehinde, and Toyin, 2015; Adebisi, 2012; Emma, Ikechukwu and Okolo, 2014; Abdulhamid and Chima, 2015; Abovu, 2015). Examination of such studies revealed that, the majority of such reviews are of the view that, insufficient funding, lack of autonomy, in adequate skills personnel, accountability and prudent management of resources deficit as well as corruption are among the most challenging variables for effective service delivery. For instance, Oladimeji, Kehinde, and Toyin (2015) study revealed that corruption, undue state interference, over politicization of the administration and staffing are the most recurring challenges for LGs service delivery in Nigeria. The study therefore concluded that most of such challenges could be resolved since they are either institutional or attitudinal. These findings were at variance with that of Adebisi (2012) which indicate that corruption, improper accountability and mismanagement of public fund, undue state interference, over redundancy of LG staff, lack of proper checking system or watchdog mechanism by the citezens, lack of proper development plan at the LG level are among the constraining factors for effective LGs service delivery. These findings were supported by Emma, Ikechukwu and Okolo (2014) study which shows that insufficient funding, poor political leadership and lack of autonomy at the local government level. While Ikeanyibe (2016) study argued that one of the fundamental constrain for effective service delivery at the local government level is the present uniform local government system as constitutionally provided in Nigeria. These findings coincided with that of Abovu (2015) study of Emohua Local Government Area which shows that insufficient funds, bribery and corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, lack of planning for Good Governance were among the challenges of LGs. Whereas Abdulhamid and Chima (2015) argued that the challenges of LGs in Nigeria emanates from the 1979 constitution, which plunged the local government system into a crisis of identity and subjected them to the whims of both state and federal governments. While Ibietan and Ndukwe (2014) observed that the personnel, policy

outcomes and political as well as administrative environments of local government administration in Nigeria are the most challenging factors for effective service delivery.

Forms of Service Delivery

(i) **Direct Service Delivery Model (DSDM)**: In this model, the central government shoulders full responsibility of delivering service to the beneficiaries. the central government legislates, enforces laws, hires staff, invests, produces and distributes services either directly from the central headquarters or through de-concentrated line agencies assumes full responsibility and is accountable not only for providing but also for delivering services (Pradeep, 2011). The government therefore controls total delivery including legislation, regulation, staff resources, financial resources, accountability and responsibility (UNDP, 1999), e. g health care delivery program and subsidy to low income family.

(ii) **Privatization Service Delivery (PSDM)**: In this model, the government transfers the delivery of public services to private companies. In this case, government assumes no responsibility, accountability, budget or regulatory function except for monitoring and supervisory role. (Paradeep, 2011; UNDP, 1999; Zubane, 2011). It involves systematic transfer of government properties, assets or government provision of a particular service to private sector, while government maintains regulatory responsibility, e.g. sale of public assets to private firms such as airways, telecommunication etc.

(iii) **Collaborations/Partnerships**: This form of collaboration service delivery otherwise known as partnerships. Partnerships are agreements between the government and the private organizations to render or provide services to the citizens on behalf of the government within specified time frame and budget for particular targets (Zubane, 2011). It involves a partnership between government and a private sector for delivering of a particular service to the public under a specified agreement. These agreements are reduced to formal and legal contracts which have penalties. The penalties could include the withholding of payments or the termination of contracts. Government makes sure that public funds are adequately managed so as to achieve better service delivery. Under PPPs, accountability for delivery of the public service is retained by the public sector whereas under privatization, accountability moves across to the private sector (the public sector might retain some regulatory price control). Under PPPs, there is no transfer of ownership and the public sector remains accountable. A service provider may be another public institution or parastartal where a Public-Public Partnership will be formed. The government can contract with a private company where a Public-Private Partnership can be formed and a non-governmental organization (NGO) or a community based organization will result into a Public-not for profit making organization partnership.

This relationship is formed when a government and the private sector agree to work cooperatively toward shared or compatible objectives (UNDP, 1999). The partnership usually specifies the purpose, nature, terms and conditions governing it, also finance, staffing and reporting. PPPs (otherwise known as P3) is among the important methods for service delivery to the public in faster and efficient manner. The PPPs are long-term contracts between the Public and Private sector. The main objective of the PPP is to ensure the delivery of well-maintained, cost effective public infrastructure or

services by leveraging private sector expertise and transferring risk to the private sector (Zubane, 2011).

In this form of partnership, the public sector will pay after the completion of the project or when services have been completed. However, this is specified in the contract agreement. The private sector has to secure loans and put its capital at risk. Due to the risks involved, the private sector has to make sure that it fulfills all the contractual agreement so as to receive the return on their investment. Government, on the other hand inspects the project and after certifying its quality pay for the service rendered. Hence, government is responsible and accountable to the public/electorates who voted for them (Zubane, 2011).

(vi) **Public-Public Collaboration/Shared Service Delivery:** This occurs when government departments enter into contractual agreements in order to deliver a certain service to the public. This can take place between different levels of governments. For instance, two or more levels of government can join together to provide a particular service. In this case the levels of government harness their resources together (both human and material). For instance one level of government may finance a particular project, while the other executes it, defending on the agreement. In this situation each level of government serves as a check against the other so as to improve accountability and thus minimize fraud and corruption.

(v) **Public-Not for Profiting Making Organization Collaboration**: This is a contractual arrangement where a non-profit organization assumes responsibility for managing a public sector enterprise, program, service or function on commercial basis. The "profits" are usually returned to the enterprise for its development but terms and conditions may require some of the earned revenues to be returned to the government (UNDP, 1999). These collaborations were introduced out of a desire to meet a particular community's need and extending a helping hand to the needy. They are called 'not –for –profit organization' because they render services to the public not for profit (Zubane, 2011). In this form of collaboration, a clear guidelines or specifications are made about what is expected among the involved parties, for instance, United Nation self-help program on education, MDG, Japan intervention program (JICA), MDG Quick wins projects, Self-help projects, Grand aided project and soon.

(vii) **Decentralization Service Delivery Model**:

In this model, provision and delivery of services are devolved to the lowest governmental tier, local bodies. The rationale is that LG as a tier of government is closer to the people and is better positioned to provide services at cheaper and efficient manner.

Decentralization means transfer of power, authority, responsibilities and functions from the central government to local or sub national units of the government (Paradeep, 2011).

Decentralization has a tendency of improving good governance, greater local participation and initiatives, transparency and accountability. Similarly, Ekpo (2007) perceives decentralization as the transfer of political power from central Government to sub-National Governments. It serves as a means of improving the efficiency and responsiveness of the public sectors. By transferring decision making power to levels of government that are close to the beneficiaries, decentralization can give citizens greater influence over the level and types of government services they consume and greater ability to hold their officials accountable. Decentralization involves the transfer of authority from a higher level of

government to a lower, delegation of decision making, placement of authority with responsibility allowing the greatest number of actions to be taken where most of the people reside, removal of functions from the centre to the level of government (Paradeep, 2011).

2.3.2 Forms of Decentralization

Studies (UNDP, 1999; Pradeep, 2011; Ekpo, 2007) have indicated three major forms of decentralization, namely; devolution, de-concentration and delegation.

(a) Devolution: This is the autonomous lower-level units such as provincial, district and local authorities that are legally constituted as separate governing bodies (UNDP, 1999). This is when central government transfers authority to semi-autonomous local government bodies for decision-making, resourcing, administration and service delivery. In this form, the local authorities are not directly accountable to central government although they have to work within the statutory rules set by it. Although these can severely constrain the actions of local government, in principle, it remains primarily politically responsible to its electorate (Ekpo, 2007:3). The UNDP (1999:3) further identified the following as fundamental characteristics of devolution;

> First, local units of government are autonomous, independent and clearly perceived as separate levels of government over which central authorities exercise little or no direct control. Second, the local governments have clearly and legally recognized geographical boundaries within which they exercise authority and perform public functions. Third, local governments have corporate status and the power to secure resources to perform their functions. Fourth, devolution implies providing services that satisfy their needs and as governmental units over which they have some influence. Finally, devolution is an arrangement in which there are reciprocal, mutually beneficial and coordinate relationships between central and local governments.

(b) Delegation: This is the form of decentralization in which the responsibility for decision-making and service delivery is transferred by central governments to semi-autonomous organizations not wholly controlled by it but remained directly answerable to it for functions delegated to them. These organizations may include local government and parastartal, the private sector and NGOs (Ekpo, 2007:3). Equally, UNDP (1999:3) defines it as;

> Semi-autonomous lower-level units, such as urban or regional development corporations to whom aspects of governance are delegated (by the central government) through legislation or under contract… It involves the transfer of government decision-making and administrative authority and/or responsibility for carefully spelled out tasks to institutions and organizations that are either under government indirect control or semi-independent.

From the above definitions, delegation refers to transfer of powers or functions or responsibilities to organizations that are not under the direct control or command of central

government ministries. Due to the importance attached to service delivery, emphasis is on additional way and it reduces weight on the traditional approaches of public service delivery.

Decentralization and Service Delivery

A study conducted by Quoc Viet (2009) as cited in Pradeep (2011:16) found that, decentralization varies greatly depending on circumstances and institutional quality of local governance. The study further argued that, despite the fact that decentralization is very vital for certain services delivery; evidence from Vietnam indicated that public services were largely delivered through centralized services delivery due to the weakness and failure of the local governments. On the contrary, study of service delivery in Nigeria using Idah LG Area of Kogi state indicates that, the LG has averagely performed better in service delivery (Agba et-el, 2013). The study indicated that, factors that affect service delivery particularly in terms of timeliness, satisfaction, adequacy and effectiveness and insufficient funds; irregular payment of salaries and allowances, undue political interference by the higher level of authorities, divided loyalty, poor observance of principle of meritocracy in recruitment and promotion of staff as well as corruption. Of course, the study is relevant and explored services delivery problems at the local Government level but too narrow (using one LG in Kogi state) to make generalization to Nigeria. A Related study by the World Bank (2006) as cited in Pradeep (2011:17) on India Rural Governments and Service Delivery revealed that lack of financial autonomy and specific laws defining roles of LGs in service delivery are the main reasons for poor LGs services delivery in India. It further added that, LGs services delivery in India largely failed due to lack of financial and administrative control. Husain (2008) as cited in Pradeep (2011:18) study, on Service Delivery in Pakistan revealed that, services delivery particularly on physical infrastructures were more effective than centrally provided.

A similar study indicated that dissatisfaction with the centralized approaches to delivering local public services motivated many countries to decentralize responsibility for certain services to lower level of governments (Ahmad et-el, 2012). Though the work has clearly provided an insight on the incentives to be derived from decentralization of services delivery to local level, it did not explain the effect of decentralization on mismanagement, local corruption especially in the de**v**eloping countries like Nigeria. From the above literature reviewed, most of the works have made general analyses of decentralization and services delivery.

Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the challenges for effective LGs service delivery in Nigeria. Relevant existing literature was reviewed. The majority of the literature shows that, though each LG has its own peculiar challenges, however, the majority of the LGs share the following challenges in common: Lack of autonomy, mismanagement, corruption and lack of skills personnel.

The study found that over the years, one of the challenges negating Local Government performance in the delivering of services to the grassroots communities is lack of autonomy to perform its functions without undue interference by the higher level of authorities particularly the State government. This is framed in the so called joint account and joint project system which make it very difficult for them to expend expenditure unless it fall on the interest of the state government. Therefore the success or failure of Local Government financial autonomy largely depends on state government allowed LGs to perform their constitutional responsibilities without undue interference.

Findings of the study also indicate that this inadequate autonomy derives from inadequate Constitutional Provisions for LGs that would guarantee them to perform their functions effectively as true autonomous entity. In Nigeria, For instance, the 1999 constitution of Nigeria did not adequately provide for the financial autonomy of the local governments as it subordinates LGs to the states through the provision, in section 162, paragraph 6, for the establishment and operation of State Local Government Joint Account. This provision make it very difficult for the LGs to access their revenue directly from the federation account This interference in the local government financial autonomy reasonably accounts for their inability to initiate and execute development programs or projects.

The study also found that LGs in the Nigeria suffers from inadequate finance to perform their functions of the local government requires by the constitution. This means that LGs revenues do not correspond with the expenditure responsibilities shouldered on them. Therefore adequate funding of the local government becomes critical and vital.

The study also revealed that mismanagement is one of the challenging factors responsible for failure of LGs in Nigeria to deliver effective services to the local communities. Studies indicated that LG officials have been found wanting in mismanaging public funds. Therefore accountability deficit at the LG level is been considered among the major challenge for LGs service delivery.

The study found that in spite of the existence of the existence of Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and other anti-corruption institutions, corruption is still on the increase especially at the grassroots level. This has led to poor performance of LGs and rendered them unaccountable to the funds allocated to them. Offices of the elected officials at the grassroots level are being considered as a means to enrich themselves. Budgets are framed without being executed. Where it is executed, projects are implanted.

Conclusion

The study examined the challenges of LGs administration in Nigeria with the view to provide suitable alternative for better service delivery. Most of the literature reviewed indicated that among the prominent challenging factors for effective service delivery includes lack of LG autonomy, sufficient fund (especially internally generated revenue) to carry out their constitutional responsibilities, mismanagement of public funds, poor skills personnel and corruption. The study also concluded that LGs in Nigeria have failed to provide adequate services to local communities despite the decentralization of responsibilities to lower level of government and available service delivery alternatives.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

Local Government should embark on collaborative partnership with the local communities in delivering some basic services. This to a large extent would improve accountability, sustainability and supervision of services by the community concerned.

More efforts by the Anti-corruption agencies should be intensified and geared toward tackling corruption at the Local Government level.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGO) should be encouraged to involve in supervision the conduct of LGs administration in Nigeria.

LGs autonomy could be enhanced through the following measures:

a. Local Governments in Nigeria should be given adequate autonomy so as to perform their constitutional responsibilities without undue interference by their state government. This can be achieved by abolition the present state-local government joint account system. This to a large extent would enhance their financial status and reduce state control over LGs revenues.

b. That the local governments in Nigeria should have direct and free access to the statutory allocations from the Federation account and their share of the internally generated revenue.

c. That LG election should be conducted on regular and specific intervals by INEC. This to a large extent would reduce state manipulation of LGs elections through state electoral commission.
d. The statutory allocation for LG from the federation account should be increase so as to allow them perform their constitutional responsibilities.

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