



Good governance and local government administration in Nigeria: An imperative for sustainable development

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Abstract

This paper examines the significance of good governance in addressing the challenges affecting the capacity of local government system to ensure sustainable development at the grass root level in Nigeria. The study began with a premise that local government as a tier of government in the country is the most important institution that could guarantee sustainable development at the grass root level. This could be seen from the functions and role vested on the institution as contained in the amended Nigeria's 1999 constitution. However, the paper argued that the performance of local government as it relates to grass root development in the country is quite dismal largely due to poor management of resources, lack of autonomy, inadequate local leadership. With the aid of qualitative instruments, the paper argued that institutionalization of good governance is one of the best strategies for sustainable development at local level. This could be achieved through constructive engagement of the in policy design and implementation, institutionalization of accountability standard in local government procurement, acquisition of competent professional civil servants and compliance with public service ethical code as major ways through which sustainable development could be guaranteed at the local level. The paper further recommends enforcement of local government autonomy, improving the collection and utilization of local internally generated revenue as well as close collaboration between local government and relevant government agencies as ways for institutionalization of good governance and by extension sustainable development at local government level.

Keywords: Local Government; Good Governance; Institutionalization; Sustainability; Development

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1. Introduction

Following political independence in October 1960, the Nigerian state has adopted different frameworks of governance in order to guarantee local and national development. Local government system is one of the popular institutional frameworks that were adopted to facilitate development at the grass root level. The essence of creating local government system in Nigeria is to among other things ensure grass root development, leadership training, bring government closer to the people and by extension improve the living condition of the local people. According to the 1976 local government reforms, the purpose of creating local government is to bring government closer to the people as well as formulate and implement development programmes for the benefits of the grass root people (FGN, 1976). It is in line with these objectives that the fourth schedule of the Nigeria's 1999 constitution (as amended) clearly identified the major functions of local government to include participation in economic planning for the development of the state, collection of taxes, construction and maintenance of rural roads as well as other local social services for the betterment of the grass root.

Given the functions it performs, local government as an institutional design could be regarded as indispensable instrument for sustainable development. This is largely because the institution is saddled with the responsibility of providing services to over 60% of the Nigerian population who are largely found in rural areas (NBS, 2014). However, local governments have failed to perform their constitutional role several decades after their creation and in spite of the increasing funding from the federation account. This precarious performance of local governments could be connected to all forms of mismanagement and corruption that embedded the system of local government in Nigeria. Given this scenario, scholars, statesmen and some concern Nigerians argued that local government system has outlived its usefulness and should be abolish. Empirical evidence revealed that there are several factors that contributed to the dismal performance of local governments in ensuring sustainable development across the country. Some of these factors include but not limited to low revenue generating capacity, poor leadership and management capacities of both political leadership and career bureaucrats, political interference as well as the absence of culture of good governance and accountability. In view of the foregoing factors it was argued that the process of creating local government system that would guarantee and engendered sustainable development was not visibly seen in the near future (Akhakpe et al., 2012). Against the foregoing, there is the urgent need for general reform to address the lingering challenges affecting local government in the country. Therefore following the return of democratic rule in 1999, the Nigerian government embarked upon general governance reforms to among other things improve quality of governance across the levels of administration. One of these reform initiatives was the recognition of the principle of good governance in state administration. The principle of good governance is a framework of administration recently developed for particularly developing countries to guide them in dealing with the problems of service delivery and democratic consolidation. It is a tool and a mechanism for enhancing service delivery and ensuring transparency in governance. It was introduced in Nigeria as part of measures to overcome domestic challenges affecting governance institutions in the country.

It is against this background that this paper examines the significance of good governance in facilitating sustainable development at the grass root in Nigeria. The objective of this study is to provide insight on how good governance could shape and influence the nature and character local government for better service delivery in Nigeria. Therefore the paper set to contribute to the growing debate on the relevance of good governance mechanisms in facilitating sustainable development at the local level. In order to achieve these objectives, the paper is divided into five sections. The first section introduces the paper; the second section examines the evolution and development of local government in Nigeria. This is followed by a theoretical discourse on good governance and sustainable development, the fourth section identifies practical strategies for institutionalization of good governance at local government level and ways it could influence sustainable development and the last section concludes the study.

2. Evolution and development of local government system in Nigeria

Countries across the globe design different layers of governance to facilitate their development. These layers are created to among others bring government closer to the people and by extension enhance citizens' participation in policy conception, design and implementation. As part of general governance reform, the Nigerian government has introduced local government system as an institution of governance at the local level. The idea for local government creation in Nigeria could also be argued to have been conceived as an effort to ensure citizens' political inclusion as well as a guarantee service delivery at the grass root level. Sunday et al. (2013) argued that one major function of local government is to provide machinery for the discussion of the local needs and for the provision of corresponding services within the competence and capability of the local area. Thus, local government as an institutional design could create and expand the political space and by extension enhance democratic governance.

Historically, the evolution of local government could be divided into three periods namely the colonial period, post-colonial period and the 1976 local government reform. It is significant to note that local system of administration was one of the few institutions that was created immediately after the establishment of colonial rule in Nigeria. The desire to address the problems of insecurity, inadequate manpower and revenue collection was the major factor responsible for the creation of local system of administration during the colonial period. In this regard, indirect rule system was introduced and traditional rulers and their institution were coopted into the colonial system. This was further consolidated through the establishment of the Native Authority (N.A) in the later part of colonial rule in Nigeria. The N.A local system was essentially designed to facilitate and consolidate the indirect rule system particularly in areas characterized with stiff resistance to the colonial rule. Perhaps, this explains why the pattern, composition and method of local administration during the colonial and post-colonial periods vary from one region to another. Regardless of the variation, the native traditional rulers were appointed to enforce colonial policies with the mandate for the collection of taxes, settlement of local dispute and maintenance of law and order. This arrangement introduced traditional institutions into state administration with enormous powers to monitor and ensure service delivery at the local level.

It is however significant to note that indirect rule system recorded different outcomes in Nigeria. While the system was successful in the northern region, in both the western and eastern region, the performance of indirect rule was partial and a complete failure. The reason for its different performance across Nigeria could not be unconnected with the nature and character of the traditional system of administration in the regions and the similarity it has with the indirect rule. For instance, in the northern region, the existing *Sarauta*/Islamic administrative system and the codification of the Sharia laws were integrated into the colonial system and thus responsible for the actualization of the indirect rule system. Whereas in both the western and eastern regions, the indirect rule system was not only incompatible with their traditional systems of administration but was forcefully used by the colonial masters to intimidate and suppress all opposition against the colonial rule. The natives in these regions saw the indirect rule and the colonial system as grand designs for political domination and economic exploitation of their communities and thus resisted with different forms of violence. Regardless of its performance, local system of administration during the colonial period played a more autonomous or rather direct and larger role in the control and management of the local economy.

However, with the increasing agitation for self-rule by the educated elites and nationalist groups, the entire local government underwent remarkable transformation by the early 1950s. Indeed, the second phase of the development of local government system began from 1950 to 1975. One of the major development that affected the size, composition and functions of local government system during this period was the adoption of federal system of government which recognizes the creation and division of powers to regional governments. With this development the country was divided into three regions namely northern, western and eastern regions. Each regional government was mandated to design its own system of local government administration including a system of indirect election as a means of choosing local council membership. In addition, each regional government was empowered to create, manage and fund its local administration. Although the powers of the regions were limited during this period but it could be argued that the introduction of regional arrangement system provide some level of independence to local leadership in terms of policy making and implementation as well as generation of funds to finance local development projects. This transformed local system of administration into a fertile ground for improves service delivery and a means for recruitment of national leadership.

The third period of the development of local government system in Nigeria coincided with the military rule in Nigeria. This political development has at the onset eroded the status of local governments by transferring some of the functions of the N.A system such as the prison and police duties to state and federal governments. However, in 1976 a reform committee was set up by General Obasanjo's regime to reform the local government system in the country. Essentially, the 1976 local government reform was initiated to address constitutional and operational defects confronting local government throughout the country. According to Brigadier Shehu Musa Yar'Adua "the federal military government has decided to reorganize local government as the third tier of government and thus is expected to do precisely what the government implies" (FGN, 1976). Some of the significant features of the reform were the rationalization and harmonization of local government system across the nation, the recognition of the local government by the constitution as a tier of government as well as the provision of substantial grants to settle outstanding

liabilities and be able to start on a good foundation across the country. This reform initiative set the foundation for the contemporary Nigeria's local government system. In recent times, series of reforms were initiated by successive government such as the General Ibrahim Babangida and General Sani Abacha to consolidate the 1976 reform. Part of some of the achievements of these reforms were the creation of more local government areas to contain with the increase in Nigeria's population, the democratization of local government system, progressive increase in the local government funding from the federation account and the granting of local government autonomy. All these shaped and continue to shape and influence the development of local government system in Nigeria.

3. Sustainable development and good governance nexus

Generally, sustainable development is one of the topical paradigms introduced in developing countries as a holistic approach to deal with the development issues confronting the countries. It is a framework initiated as a response to combine and complex development challenges faced by developing countries. It could be described as an idea that view economic growth, poverty reduction, social development, equity, and sustainability not as competing goals to be traded off against each other, but as interconnected objectives which are most effectively pursued together (Larbi, 1999; Cheema, 2007).

As countries became engraved with development challenges, the ideals of sustainable development and the gospel of democracy are also spreading like bush fire across the developing countries. In fact, it has often been argued that sustainable development is an accompanying framework for building and consolidating democracy. However, for democracy to strives and get consolidated to the extent of bringing about sustainable `development, the culture of good governance and accountability has to be promoted, entrenched and institutionalized in policy-making and implementation. This suggests that there is significant relationship between sustainable development and good governance. Impliedly, sustainable development could only be achieved where good governance is institutionalized. Perhaps this explains why Cheema (2007) argued that good governance could be seen as a system of values, policies and institutions by which a society manages its economic, social and political affairs through interactions within and among the state, civil society and the private sector. Thus, institutionalization of good governance in state administration requires mechanisms, institutions and processes, through which people injects and mediate their interests as well as exercise their constitutional rights and obligations. However, injecting and mediating citizens' interest is only possible where the citizens are involved in the conception, formulation and implementation of sustainable development programmes. In this regard good governance could only be guaranteed where public officials put in place an integrative policy-making device that appreciates citizens' opinions in development programmes. More so, governance could only be good when public officials' employs the principles of accountability and transparency in the formulation of sustainable development programmes. In this regard, Noor (2008) maintained that where the term governance is collapsed with "good" it means expression of itself through attributes such as efficiency, accountability, transparency, due process, rule of law, participation, justice and control of corruption. In this regard, participation, pluralism, subsidiarity,

accountability, transparency, equity, access, partnership and efficiency in service provisioning are instrumental to ensuring good governance.

The foregoing suggests that there are certain drivers that enhance good governance, especially in pursuance of sustainable development programmes. The first and most important one is the principle of accountability. First, accountability has been described as a way of being answerable or liable for one's actions or inactions and conduct, in office or position. It is equally seen as a process of making public officials accountable and responsible for their action to the people who elected or appointed them into office (Adeyemi et al., 2012). Simply put, accountability has to do with stewardship as well as given explanations for conduct by public officials. It assumes that public officials both elected and appointed are entrusted with public resources and thus, charged with the responsibility of managing public affairs. In this regard, public officials are required at intervals to give adequate and timely explanations to citizens as to how they run the affairs of the government. These engagements could be made through the parliament, the media or any other available means that conveniently communicate information to citizens.

According to Muhammad (2003), accountability has different dimensions and could be classified into financial, political, administrative, social and ethical accountability. Firstly, financial accountability implies establishment and compliance with the accounting and financial procedure in the management of public fund by public officials. It involves respecting the principle of budget and budgetary procedure in the allocation of resources for development programmes in addition to developing a mechanism of outside check to guard against extravagance and mismanagement. In addition, Ayo (1995) maintained that financial accountability implies justification of estimates, the super-intendance of the use of appropriated funds, the devices for timing the rate of expenditure and the auditing of account. The major objective of financial accountability is to ensure substantial compliance with public sector financial management regulations with a view to avoiding mismanagement of public resources. The second type of accountability is political accountability which is premised on giving explanations by public servants and their elected counterpart to legislative bodies such as the local government legislative or state houses of assemblies. The essence of political accountability is to evaluate the performance of public officials and gives citizens' opportunity to decide on them. This is very important, especially when in sustainable development issues at local government level. Therefore citizens are expected to engage the political leadership in meaningful discussion; ask and raise fundamental questions with regard to what type of development they desire and how such development will affect the future of their communities.

Another dimension of accountability is administrative and it relates to the institutionalization of internal rules and norms to check the excesses of public officials. Adeyemi (1995) argued that constitutionally local government officials are expected to comply with statutory and administrative procedures to ensure due process in local government financial management. For example, the financial memorandum (FM) contains statutory and administrative rules guiding budgeting, planning, accounting procedures, and general financial management of local government funds. Similarly, the state government also issue circulars and guidelines from time to time to guide local government financial administration. The domestication and signing of procurement law and fiscal responsibility act by some state governors is a good example of financial laws designed to avoid administrative indiscipline by public officials. Social accountability is the fourth dimension

of accountability and it entails subjecting government agencies to outside inspection through participatory public policy, budgeting and public expenditure tracking and citizen monitoring and evaluation of service delivery. The essence of social accountability is to empower citizens to exercise their rights and hold public officials accountable in relation to sustainable development programmes (Pradhan, 2010). Last but not the least is ethical accountability which harps on the need for compliance with ethical code of public service in relation to conduct of public officials within and outside of government agencies. Essentially, it is the practice of improving overall personal and organizational performance by developing and promoting responsible tools and professional expertise and advocating an effective enabling environment for people and organizations to embrace a culture of sustainable development (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/accountability>).

4. Strategies for institutionalization of good governance in local government administration

From the foregoing discussion, it could be argued that the capacity of local government to deliver their service delivery functions and remain important instrument for sustainable development require effective institutionalization of those instruments that could guarantee good and quality governance. Hence, there is a strong relationship between good governance and sustainable development in that one cannot be achieved without the other. The former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan remarked that good governance and sustainable development are indivisible and cannot be separated (Annan, 2007). He further asserts that governance, especially when it assumes a normative dimension of being qualified as good, is generally believed to be the basis for state reconstruction, society and polity. This suggests that for any meaningful development to take place in a society, the culture of good governance has to be entrenched. This is by way of engaging the people in serious dialogue and consultation in decision-making and design of public policies. In view of the foregoing, Babangida (2010) contends that people's participation in policy making and consensus building are prerequisite for good governance and by extension the basis for sustainable development. Therefore, without people being the driving force of development, which good governance espouses, development can hardly take place and if it does, it cannot be sustainable.

Closely connected to the foregoing is the desire to engage the private sector in sustainable development programmes. In recent times, sustainable development efforts are increasingly becoming a cooperative endeavor, therefore there is need to bring to the fore a workable private-sector participation arrangements in the delivery of services. Several studies have identified different public private arrangement including Build-operate-transfer (BOT), Build-own-operate (BOO), Build-own-operate and transfer (BOOT), Outsourcing (contracting out of service), participatory management (Abdullahi, 2014; Roumboutsos et al., 2013). However, not all forms of partnership are compatible with the local government development programmes, as such, public officials must exercise some caution in choosing the best partnership framework for sustainable development (Bangura, 1999; Batley, 2006; Larbi, 1999).

Another strategy for good governance in sustainable development efforts is the institutionalization of due process mechanism in local government procurement process. Due process refers to a policy framework in which governmental activities and business is conducted openly, economically and transparently without favoritism and corruptible tendencies (Ezekwesile cited from Kura, 2012). It implies a mechanism for ensuring strict compliance with openness, competition and cost accuracy rules and procedures in procurement of goods and services by local government councils. Essentially, due process mechanism is expected to promote openness and competition in the award of contracts and supply of services. Openness and competition encouraged participation of the widest pool of supplies and allow government agencies to select among the participants the best bid that could offer value for money. More importantly, openness and competition reduce cost of contract and eliminate corruption in procurement process (Abdullahi, 2014). But due process as a strategy for good governance cannot achieve its desired objectives where procurement lacks transparency in terms of providing adequate and timely information regarding local government operations and conduct.

Similarly, institutionalization of good governance in sustainable development programmes cannot be possible without the use of competent and professional civil servants such as procurement experts, engineers, accountant, administrators, surveyors etc. In recent times, the responsibilities of these professionals have shifted and are directly more involved in development efforts in close collaboration with the private sector. Against the foregoing, three major roles of the professional civil service are easily discernible. First, civil service has the major task of translating into concrete actions the policies of political bodies for the common good of the citizens. It is equally the main instrument which government uses to regulate and manage all aspects of the economy of a society. In addition, it is the main medium through which all institutions obtain various types of approvals, licenses, permits, etc. Indeed, all institutions have to deal with the civil service at one point or the other in their existence and operations. The degree to which sustainable socio-economic and political progress is attained is largely dependent or linked to the utilization and performance of the civil service (Yayale, 2012). In view of their expertise, competence, information and knowledge at their disposal, professional civil servants have a greater role in the conceptualization, formulation and implementation of sustainable development programmes at local level. In addition, there is the need to initiate the development of accountability systems for public service entailing development of measurable indices of performance, by which every player in the local government will be held accountable for his/her performance. This would help foster a culture of accountability and guarantee sustainable development. More importantly is the enforcement of audit of local government accounts through timely and accurate financial reporting as well as strengthening existing organs for enforcing financial discipline including legislative provisions.

Compliance with ethical standard and public scrutiny are also essential components of good governance in local government administration. While ethical rules provide the basis for conduct of all public officials, public scrutiny according to Zabra cited in Adeyemi, et.al (2012) is an important instrument for sustaining accountability and trust in public life and public officers. This is because public scrutiny subject public office holders to outside inspection except with regard to personal life and standard. Essentially such inspection is to ensure that local resources are committed to what they were meant for as an effective way of sustaining

development at the grass root. In recent times, the citizenry directly or through non-governmental organizations served as watchdog in all development programmes. Therefore, different mechanisms such as Servicom, Local Government Integrity Initiative (LGII) should be adopted and strengthened as effective instruments in the hands of the citizens to check the excesses of public officials at local level. The initiatives should be directed towards rebranding local government as it relates to contract award and project execution across local communities.

Closely connected to the above is the urgent desire for constitutional review to among other things settle the lingering question of local government autonomy. There is a strong connection between local government autonomy, institutionalization of good governance and sustainable development. The capacity of local government to mobilize and effectively manage local resources and be held accountable is directly connected to the autonomy in terms of their ability to initiate development projects and design ways of implementing them. Therefore where there is absence of local government autonomy, it is impossible if not difficult for good governance to be institutionalized let alone ensure sustainable development. It is important to add that the constitutional trajectories surrounding local government autonomy has gradually transformed local government into toothless bull dogs that could neither bite nor bark. The problems of incapacity associated with local government in Nigeria could be explained from the way local government powers and responsibilities are thwarted or sabotaged by the political leadership. For instance, the lingering crisis of poor service delivery and culture of impunity that bedeviled local government areas could be linked to the constitutional problems associated with the powers, funding and relationship between local councils and their states governments. State governors hijacked local government allocation and denied them the constitutional 10 percent of the state internally generated revenue under the pretext of state-local government joint account. State governments' releases money to local governments only to pay staff salaries and in some instances their staff are owed for months (Agbodike et al., 2014). This transformed local government areas into mere administrative units or personal estate of the state governors who often used local government funds to finance their political campaigns and rallies. This transformation created patronage relationship and denied local governments from carrying out their constitutional responsibilities of grass root development with serious implication on governance.

5. Conclusion

The paper argued that local government as a third tier of government is an important component of the state for ensuring sustainable development. The paper examines how good governance could facilitate sustainable development at local government level and the various strategies that could be adopted to ensure compliance with the principles of good governance in the administration of sustainable development programmes. In view of the foregoing, structures, institutions and leadership at local government level must work in a cooperative way in order to achieve the desired result for sustainable development. This requires close collaboration between the local government service commission, the state ministry for local government affairs and the various local government areas in training and re-training of personnel, funding

and monitoring of local development programmes across the country. Similarly, there is urgent need to regulate and minimize interference by other levels of government to a more robust engagement with the benefiting communities in the work and conduct of local government areas. In this regard, granting of local government autonomy is considered to be important for the actualization of sustainable development at the grass root level. On their part, local government councils have to design practical strategies to enhance their internal revenue to augment the allocation from the federation account in order to meet up with their development challenges. This is the surest way through which local government could serve as vehicles for sustainable development across Nigeria.

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