

Local Government Service Delivery and Policy Evaluation: The Case of Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development, Ontario International Development Agency, Canada
ISSN 1923-6654 (print) ISSN 1923-6662 (online) www.oidaijsd.com
Also available at <http://www.ssrn.com/link/OIDA-Intl-Journal-Sustainable-Dev.html>

Abstract: Government at the local level performs a vital role in ensuring effective provision of public goods to the vast rural populace. Available facts reveal that more than seventy percent of Nigeria's population emanate from rural areas; where local government is constitutionally empowered to provide social and public services such as electricity, health centers, water supply, schools and roads. Informed by recent controversies surrounding the granting of autonomy to local governments and as reliable vehicles for service delivery, this paper seeks to examine specific policies that enhance service delivery at the local level and evaluates performance in Nigeria's fourth republic. By relying on qualitative data, extensive literature review and descriptive analysis, this paper reflects on the 1976 local government reforms and the objectives of decentralization in Nigeria, debates present state and nature of service delivery by various administrations. I argue that service delivery is strongly administered at the federal and state government levels respectively while in most cases the local governments are marginalized, hence, treated as mere appendages or machinery of the state. The paper however concludes that there is incremental effect of service delivery when policies address felt-needs of the local people through local governments resulting to improved well-being and human resource development, accelerative productivity and income generation, market expansion, rapid decline in rural-urban migration and crime rates, less dependent on foreign aids and imported goods, popular participation, effective decision making and political stability.

Keywords: local government performance, public service delivery, Governance

Introduction

Governance of a nation cannot be termed effective, efficient, equitable or good if the supposed beneficiaries at the local level of government administration do not enjoy essential services. Recall that at this level, government is brought closest to the people. In other words, the local government is that level of government where governance can be measured and adjudged "good or bad", "effective or ineffective" in a lowest form of assessment as far as service delivery is concerned. However, the availability and effectiveness in delivery of public service cannot be divorced from governance system of any nation (Khemani, 2001; Rodden, 2002; Andrews & Shar, 2003; World Bank, 2003). According to Humphreys (1998) delivery of services has a direct and immediate effect on the quality of the lives of people in a given community. Little wonder that governance in developed democracies is about service delivery and largely engages local governance. Most developing nations like those in Africa are yet to adequately associate with this fact (Cheema & Rondenelli, 1984; Olowu, 1990; Gwayi, 2010). Public service delivery is still to a large extent, administered by central governments while the local governments are seen as their mere appendages (Ihemeje, 2016; Oviasuyi et al, 2010; Akindele et al, 2002). Given that the central government is far from the reach of the people at the grassroots, it therefore makes it practically impossible for the citizens' felt-needs to receive adequate attention and their involvement in decision making treated with levity. Hence the continuous poor treatment accorded the local government in policy and implementation by the upper levels of government has adverse effect on its service delivery.

There is no gainsaying that Nigeria is comatose by ineffective public service delivery. A county popularly addressed as "Giant of Africa" among committee of nations, majorly due to her population size which is put at 190, 069, 443

by United Nations estimate of 2017 (www.worldometers.info); is a heterogeneous society characterized by multiple ethnic, cultural and language diversity, and comprise 1 federal government, 36 states plus a federal capital territory, Abuja and 774 local government areas but apparently perceived to be rendering little or no social services. It is worthy to note that between the 1976 local government reforms and the present democratic government of Nigeria's fourth republic which was inaugurated on May 29, 1999, that the state of public service delivery, particularly at the local government level is nothing to write home about. It is reported that cities are faced with poor power supply, dismal public transportation, inefficient security and fire-fighting services, insufficient educational institutions, inaccessible and poorly funded medical facilities and non-existent public water supply in some cases (Elias et al, 2014). Arising from the mentioned conundrums, tax payer Nigerians have now resorted to digging boreholes for their own water supply, engaging the services of vigilante groups for their own form of security, devised means of electricity through the use of generating set, managed their waste disposals, involve in community road constructions as well as providing for affordable education. In this connection therefore, it is argued that policy drawn from the constitution and its manner of implementation that determines how essential services are delivered to citizens.

In order to address the issues raised and for demystification of analysis, the paper is structured into four sections. Section one is the introduction and is well discussed, while section two is the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings. Section three delves into policy evaluation of service delivery at the Nigerian local government level in the fourth republic. Section four concludes the paper and also makes policy recommendations as to ensuring effective service delivery in Nigerian local governments.

Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinnings

In this section attempt is made to bring to fore relevant conceptual and theoretical underpinnings. Conceptually, local government has attracted several definitions over the years. However, unlike other concepts, it has not generated much controversy with respect to its real meaning. An exploration of some of these definitions could be useful to the ongoing discourse. The United Nations Office for Public Administration defines local government as:

a political subdivision of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the powers to impose taxes or exert labor for prescribed purpose. The body of such entity is elected... (Adamolekun, 1983).

Sequel to the above assertion, local government therefore becomes a substructure, upon which the superstructures of the federal and state governments are anchored, that is to say, local government provides immense support for both the federal and state governments to continue to exist and function. Corroboratively, local government is defined as "that unit of administration with defined territory and powers as well as administrative authority with relative authority" (Akhape, 2011). The historic Nigeria's 1976 local government reforms capture its definition along these lines:

Government at local level exercise through representative council 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 compliment the activities of the state and federal governments in their areas and to ensure, through devolution of functions to their councils and through the active participation of the people and traditional institutions, but that local initiative and response to local needs are maximized and condition are maximized (FRN, 1976).

The various definitions above are quite revealing and far-reaching as they shed much light on the meaning, significance, and jurisdiction of local government administration. Beyond that, local government exists to reach out to people at the grassroots for the purpose of identifying and satisfying their basic needs. These basic needs are the essential social and public services which should be provided by the government rather than the local residents themselves because the local government is constitutionally empowered to cater for roads, portable water supply, electricity, health clinics and maternity centers, and schools. Humphreys (1998: 6-7) defines "public services as those services that are mainly or completely funded by taxation...can differ markedly from commercial private-sector services in a number of ways...include the following areas of management: central and local government, the health authorities, education, degree, justice home affairs and non-commercial semi-state organization."

Bringing the issue of service delivery to the front burner of conceptualization, studies reveal how the local government play pivotal role in such local concern (Adamolekun et al, 1988; Akindele, 2004). Adamolekun et al (1998:2) succinctly observes that:

The division of responsibilities for public services is generally built on the broad concept that some services need to be established to create a common national standard for all (for example, health and defense) and that these should therefore be controlled by the central government; that others are best provided in the broader sub-divisions of the nation rather than at the centre (for instance, regional state planning for economic development); and that others again are best administered in accordance to local needs and therefore should be decentralized down to the local level.

The observation strongly supports that local government is expected to cater for the local residents and the area as whole in a manner that would not clash with the jurisdictions of federal and state governments respectively. Akindele (2004) notes that:

Local government institution is a mechanism for mobilizing and integrating the grassroots for management and governance of local affairs, satisfaction of the needs of local people through effective service delivery, efficient and effective mobilization human and material resources for effective and efficient service delivery.

From the forgoing it is crystal-clear that the Nigerian-State is structured into three-tier system, it consists of the federal, state and local governments, while each has its functional areas spelt-out in the constitution. By virtue of this structural arrangement vis-a-vis its implication, local government therefore is both theoretically and practically at vantage location to play a valuable role towards the improvement of service delivery.

In its theoretical formation, this paper is based on the structural-functionalism approach. This is one of the major approaches in the social sciences and administration. Structural-functionalism 'sets out to interpret the society as a structure with interrelated parts' with each structure performing role function; while the failure of one structure leads to structural-dysfunctionalism, disorderliness, chaos or even anarchy in the system. Proponents of the school thought among others are Talcott Parson, Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell (Parson, 1991; Almond & Powell, 1978). It was Gabriel Almond and Bingham who argued that, in order to understand a political system, it is necessary to understand not only its institutions (or structures) but also their respective functions (Almond & Powell, 1978). They further stressed that these institutions should be properly understood and must be placed in meaningful and dynamic historical context (Almond & Powell, 1978).

The above claim has direct interpretation in the analysis and understanding of service delivery in Nigeria local government systems, with particular reference to the fourth democratic republic. Analytically, local governments are structures in the Nigerian political arrangement and are assigned with specific roles and functions to perform within the ambits of the constitution; for the chief purpose of bringing the people closer to the government through service delivery. The operations of service delivery have been performed throughout the evolution of local government administration in Nigeria along three main historical periods: pre-colonial local government, colonial local government, and the post-colonial local government Nigeria respectively.

Dysfunctionalism and disorderliness as supported by structural functionalists could be elucidated for the weakness and ineffectiveness of the local government to carry out its service delivery roles on behalf of the local populace promptly and satisfactorily. Note that local government co-exists with state and federal governments as interrelated parts within the nation's political system, hence the need for local governments to wake up to her constitutional responsibilities of service delivery especially in this present fourth democratic republic and be proactive like the state and federal governments. This theory is therefore suitable because Nigerian government just like other democratic nations of the world identified and agreed to create local government as a third tier in her political composition rather than as a mere appendage; allotted with functional responsibility and backed by financial capability for effective service delivery at the grassroots level.

Local Government, Service Delivery and the Nigerian Fourth Republic: Policy Evaluation

This section delves into the relationship that exists among local government, service delivery and the Nigerian fourth republic with a view to know what exactly went wrong and why. Earlier noted; local government is the third tier of government and closest to the people, identifying their needs and providing social and public services. This view is well-accepted in the present Nigeria's fourth republic in principle but not in practice. Here, a number of issues shall be raised which contribute to the inept service delivery system in Nigeria.

Constitutionally, both state and local governments are entitled to statutory allocation in the Federation Account; being a divisible pool of federally-generated revenues, including oil revenues which form the major bulk of all government resources in Nigeria. The exact percentage accruing to different tiers is subject review every five years

by the National Assembly upon the advice from the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC). Similarly, LGAs are entitled to a share in federally-collected Value Added Tax (VAT), being revenues collected outside the Federation Account. These statutory allocations are the main sources of funding the local government expenditure responsibilities (Khemani, n.d). LGAs are also expected to receive money from the state revenues but the rules to enforce it are either less strict or not available at all (Ekpo & Ndebbio, 1998).

Between 1999 and 2016, the LGAs were entitled to 20 percent of total revenues in the Federation Account, and in 2002 and up to 2016 the formula were revised with local governments entitled to a slightly higher percentage. In most cases, these funds are either not enough or not readily made available. In fact, the Buhari's administration is worse-off in the disbursement of funds to execute public service delivery purposes at the local government areas as far as the financial history of Nigeria is concerned since her independence of 1960. In the course of his administration, local government staffers in about 27 states have not be paid salaries of several months (Punch, 2016); while those paid are greeted with high-cuts from their monthly salaries who are mainly primary school teachers. Most LGAs often report that this was caused by "zero-allocations" they got (World Bank, 2003).

Weak internally generated revenue accounts for another reason why the local governments are inadequately attended to, with respect to service delivery. The constitution expects local councils to generate their revenues, in part, from: entertainment tax, motor park tax, trading and marketing licenses; radio and television licenses and rates, shop and kiosk rates; as well as tenement rates; on-and-off liquor licenses, slaughter slab fees, marriage, birth and death registration fees, cattle tax payable by cattle owners themselves; signboard and advertisement permit fees; and customary burial ground fees. Most local government areas in different states of the country have insufficient resources or tax base to compliment the effort of the government. And as such, most local governments strongly depend on federal resources, except for local governments in Lagos and Kano that generate up to 46 to 95 percent of the annual budget of states.

In federal-state-local government relations there had been modicum of crisis. Experiences of such were recorded on the account of undue and incessant interference in Sokoto, Imo, and Bayelsa States respectively. For example, Sokoto State government was taken to court by 15 local government councils and the court prohibited it from deducting 3 percent of its statutory allocation to fund Sokoto Emirate Council, as passed by the State House of Assembly (Vanguard, 1999:1-2). In May 2004, President Obasanjo withheld statutory allocation to local government councils in the States of Niger, Nasarawa, Ebonyi, Lagos, and Katsina, which had created new local government areas and conducted elections. The affected States challenged the president at the Supreme Court over withholding statutory allocations; they argued that were not asking for the new local governments, rather to the old ones, until such time that the National Assembly could make amendments to Section 8(3) of the constitution. In Imo State, the local government chairmen argued that state governors plot to remove from office by using audit powers of the state. State governors had been accused of reducing the three year tenure of council chairmen to two; as result of this, 300 local government councilors that protested were arrested by the police (Vanguard, 2001:1-2). The case of Bayelsa reveals how some local government councilors took the state governor and local government chairmen to court for sharing allocations from Federation Account with the new and illegal local governments; as a way to disenfranchise the people (Punch, 2001:1-2).

The issue of corruption remains a major constraint to effective service delivery to the local governments in Nigeria. Ezeani (2004) revealed that no fewer than thirty one local government chairmen parts of the country were either under investigation, impeached or on suspension due to allegation of corruption. Adeyemi (2012) decried the humongous and ridiculous rate of corruption at the local government council level as he observes that "waste of government resources at council level had reached monumental proportions in the country whereby the local government council could not explain the mismanagement of over N3.313 trillion allocated to them in the last eight years."

Local government cannot effectively formulate and implement policies like the state and federal governments because it lacks autonomy, hence the need for autonomy to be granted to the local government in Nigeria. Local government autonomy could be seen or defined as the ability of local government to some political, economic and social decision without recourse to any of the two superstructures- State and Federal governments (Olasupo, 2013:207). Autonomy is expected to fast-track service delivery to the local people, if granted.

Poor work attitude is another serious factor affecting service delivery at the local government level. It is however very clear those most local government workers and in fact, Nigerian civil servants have been described as imbibing poor work attitude which is detrimental to productivity. The poor attitude manifests in form of laziness, lateness to work, absenteeism, lying, stealing, dishonesty and indiscipline (Akerele, 1996; Ogunrin & Erhjapkor, 2009).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The population of local people in Nigerian local government areas is quite alarming and it is only through effective service delivery that their needs can be realized. Therefore this paper has been able to investigate local government service delivery within the purview of Nigeria's fourth republic and identified various challenges around it, such as inadequate financial transfer to third tier government, delayed salaries, inter-government crisis, corruption, autonomy and poor attitude to work. The paper however concludes that there is incremental effect of service delivery when policies address felt-needs of the local people through local governments resulting to improved wellbeing and human resource development, accelerative productivity and income generation, market expansion, rapid decline in rural-urban migration and crime rates, less dependent on foreign aids and imported goods, popular participation, effective decision making and political stability.

In this connection, the paper offers some policy recommendations:

- A study of this nature is a training ground or area to explore further in the conduct of research in the fields of Local Government Studies and Public Administration;
- Agencies charged with oversight functions on local government like the Local Government Service Commission, the State House of Assembly, Code of Conduct Bureau, and Academic Research Groups should periodically carry out empirical studies on service delivery performance of various local government administrations;
- The granting of autonomy is vital so as to empower the third tier economically, politically, and socially;
- Elections should be held periodically to elect council members. The idea of appointment or by selection should stop. Remember that the notion and practice of "caretaker committee chairmen" is unconstitutional. This aspect needs to be vigorously attended to;
- There should be a revision of the Electoral Act of 2010 to really give local governments adequate consideration on electoral matter;
- Asset declaration should be encouraged for all council members and careerists;
- Efforts should be made to ensure that local council officials provide adequate resources to local people, and at the same time, endeavor to increase their internally generated revenue ;
- Local government workers are advised to have good attitude toward their work; and
- The desirability of public private partnership.

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