

# STRENGTHENING CAPACITY BUILDING IN NIGERIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM

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**Abstract:** There is no doubt that the philosophy and the rationale behind the 1976 Local Government reforms in Nigeria were well-intentioned. However, these lofty ideas have been eroded by successive governments leading to paralysis of basic services to the people. This paper therefore takes a critical examination of the present state of Local Government. It strengthens (if any) and weakness with the view to re-invigorating it to meet the challenges of governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Source of data collection are based on the participant observation method and interview conducted or interaction with stakeholders over time. This work will also benefit from secondary data such as manuals, textbooks, periodicals etc. The overall philosophy of the paper is to contribute to political re-engineering of Nigeria State through the viability of Local Government as a panacea for political growth, economic stability and overall well-being of the citizenry.

**Keywords:** Capacity building, Challenges, Governance, Local government, Stakeholders

## Introduction

Local Government came to the limelight in Nigeria after 1976 Local Government Reforms, inspired by the then military regime of Generals Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo serving as his second in command. The military regime of the period (1975-1979), conceived of a viable local government as a way of re-civilizing Nigerians after thirteen years of military inter-regnum. By 1979, before the exit of military, the regime in question had carefully crafted Local Government in the constitution, thereby making it mandatory for the incoming civilian government to recognize its exist-

tence, position and functions in Nigerian political landscape.

However, with successive military and civilian administration, there has been declining fortune of this level of governance leading to near paralysis of its constitutional functions. This has been the noticeable trend across the country. How can the Nigeria populace get rid of this problem? How can we reinvigorate this level of governance? This and others shall be the main occupation of our discourse.

## Towards Conceptual Clarification

Strengthening capacity at local government level in conceptual terms involve how we can broadly speaking, as it were, invigorate both human and institutional agencies to achieve or to realize the objectives and aspirations of the society over time. However this assumption may be guilty of over generalization except we come to term with conceptual classification of the main thrust of this paper otherwise hereafter refers to as 'capacity building' and "local government".

The term capacity building like any other concept in the social sciences is capable of different definitions and interpretation for instance, capacity has been succinctly defined as the capability to perform functions or work efficiently, efficiently and economically in a containing basis with reduced dependence on external assistance or source (Egonmwan: 2002) For him he sees capacity building from three perspectives namely: (a) Human resources development (b) Institutional development and (c) Policy environment within which organizations operate and interact.

Three above variables are continuous, dynamic, and can be held in a water tight compartment. That is to say that they are independent on one another. It can be diagrammatically captured thus:

Human resources Development

→ Institutional Development

→ The Policy Environment  
Peoples, politics,  
Input-output

The human resources (personnel) are meant to determine the performances or otherwise of the institution i.e. (local government as third tier in Nigerian federation). The performance or lack of performance by the local government is implacably reflected on the people as recipient of the outcome of decision (performance) of local government. How the people react to local government of course is contingent on its performance. The performance of local government in turn is affected by the quality and quantum of human resources infused into it.

Indeed, it can be said that human resources development or management is all it takes to strengthen the capacity of local government to perform its constitutional assigned functions. Indeed (Egonmwan: 2002) graphically captures it thus: (1) The Organization, (a) It enhances performance and increase productivity (b) It heightens morale among staff (c) It reduces cost because generations are performed economically and efficiently. (d) It brings about organizational stability and flexibility to adapt to changes in technology, techniques and methods and other motivations. (2) To the individual employees: (a) It leads to the acquisition of more knowledge skills and appropriate attitudes (b) It enhances the chances of advancement within the organization and (c) It leads to more job satisfaction, increased earning and greater security. (3) To the society

It enhances overall productivity leading to increase in national income.

#### **Financial Resources and capacity building**

The availability of disposable (financial) resources is germane to human resources development, institutional development as well as environmental policy output. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the authors of the 1976 local government reform conceded a substantial amount of (#100,000,000) for the take off of about 299 (and later 301) local governments created across the Nigerian Federation, between 1976 and 1977. This was a colossal amount of money as at the time when compared with a grant of #1 million and # 1.5million made to each state of the existing twelve states in the previous years (1973-1975) fiscal years (Ola 1984) It is instructive to note that the financial fortune of the local government rose steadily from 1977/78 with a sum # 250million, 1978/79 # 300million etc. Local government currently enjoys 20.60% of the federation account but to what extent has this strengthened the capacity building at the local level?

United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) defines Capacity building as creation of an enabling environment with appropriate policy and legal

frameworks, institutional development including community participation (of women in particular), human resources development and strengthening of managerial systems. In the main, UNDP recognizes that capacity building is a long term, continuing process, in which all stakeholders (ministers, local authorities, non-governmental organization, water user groups, professional associations, academics and others) participate.

In a generic sense Capacity building can be conceived as activities which strengthen the knowledge, abilities, skills and behavior of individuals and improve institutional structures and process such that the organization can efficiently meet its mission and goals in a sustainable way.

Be that as it may, it is instructive to consider the principles that govern community capacity building.

In a large measure, capacity building more than training includes the following elements: (a) Human resource development, the process of equipping individuals with the understanding, skills and access to information, knowledge and training that enables them to perform effectively. (b) Organizational development, the elaboration of management structures, processes and procedures, not only within organizations but also the management of relationships between the different organizations and sectors (public, private and community) (c) Institutional and legal framework development, making legal and regulatory changes to enable organizations, institutions and agencies at all levels and in all sectors to enhance their capacities (an.org.)

The concept has been further amplified by (Ann:1996) as a process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adopt, and thrive in the fast changing world. In organizational sense, capacity building can encompass, governance, policy-centric leadership choice, vision and mission of the organization, strategies to accomplish them and the administration of human and financial resources. More often than not it may include revenue generation, i.e. taxation, fundraising, Appeal funds, advocacy, partnerships etc. (Linnell 2003) conceives of capacity building in relation to leadership development, advocacy skills, training / speaking abilities, technical skills, and other areas of personal and professional development.

Finally, capacity building must respond to the changing needs of individuals, organizations, and Local Governments, as a third tier in Nigeria Federation. What is more, it should fit into the aims and the philosophy of the 1976 local government reforms.

### The Local Government Reforms

The local government reforms initially had the following lofty objectives: (i) to make appropriate service and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by devolving or delegating them to local representative bodies; (ii) to facilitate the exercise of democratic self-government close to the local levels of our society, and to encourage initiative and leadership potentials; (iii) to mobilize human and material resources through the involvement of member of the public in their local development potentials; and (iv) to provide a two way channel of communication between local communities and government (both state and federal).

Since the above objectives of local government reforms, the 1979, 1989 and 1999 Constitutions had ensured its continuity as tier of government in the federation. Section 7(1) (13) of the above Constitutions state:

*The system of local government by democratically elected local government council is under this constitution guaranteed and accordingly the government of every state shall ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment, composition, finance and functions of such councils.*

The term of local government councils is three (3) years commencing from the date of the first sitting of the council. A council stands dissolved after that period (Ikogho: 168)

The constitutional provisions are ostensibly meant to invigorate or strengthen local governments but the state governors often do not allow periodic elections into the local government councils. Instead caretaker committees are wholly employed to oversee the affairs of the councils.

The Constitutional functions devolved to local governments are of three interdependent parts namely: (a) Which require detailed knowledge for efficiency performance? (b) In which success depends on community responsiveness and participation and (c) Which are of personal in nature requiring provision close where the individuals affected live and which significant use of discretion or understanding is needed (Ale:32). The main functions that are meant to be performed are contained in the fourth schedule of the 1999 constitution. It is hereafter reproduced thus:

The consideration and making recommendations to a state commission in economic planning or any similar body on: (1) The economic development of the state, particularly in so far as the areas of authority of

the council and of the state are affected and (2) Proposals made by the said commission or body.

Collection of rates, radio and television license, Establishment and maintenance cemeteries, burial grounds and homes for the destitute and infirm, Licensing of bicycle, trucks (other than mechanically propelled trucks), canoes, wheel barrow and carts., Establishment, maintenance and regulation of markets, motor parks and public conveniences.

Construction and maintenance of roads, streets drains and other public high way, parks, open spaces or such public facilities as may be prescribed from time to time by the House of Assembly of a state. Naming of roads and streets and numbering of houses. Provision and maintenance of public conveniences and refuse disposal. Registration of all births, deaths and houses or tenements for the purposes of levying such rates as may be prescribed by the House of Assembly of a state and Control and regulation of: (1) Indoor advertising and hoarding (2) Movement and keeping of pets of all descriptions (3) Shops and kiosks (4) Restaurants and other places for sale of food to the public and (5) Laundries.

The above functions are without prejudice to what a State House of Assembly may assign from time to time. It is important to stress that presently most of our local governments lack institutional capacity to discharge most of the afore-mentioned functions effectively and efficiently.

### Institutional Capacity

Institutional capacity of particular importance to this discourse is the institutionalization of presidential system of governance in the local government level in Nigeria. Presidentialism as a form of governance, as witnessed especially in the United States of America, is hinged on good governance. Good governance in turn is contingent on successful operationalisation of the machinery of government, which presidential democracy has foisted on the legislative institution, the executive and the judiciary. This is what aptly described in the literature as tripartite system of governance.

For good governance to be engendered at the local government level, it must focus on the effective and efficient management of the public affairs at the local level. The Local Government Council which constitutes the legislative institution must make good laws, control the executive activities and safeguard the interest of the people. The extent to which the office of the chairman of local government executes or performs the will of the people as enacted in the laws, determines to a large extent what constitute good governance.

In the main, elections are seldom held in legislative and executive branches of government at the local level. As stated earlier, state governments do hand-pick, their surrogates as care-takers of local government. Under this arrangement emergence of strong and virile legislative-executive institutions that can confront local challenges will be difficult if not impossible. The effect is that across the federation, most leadership at local government does not derive their legitimacy from the people they claim to represent. This has implication for revenue sharing formula of the monies distributed from the federation accounts, otherwise known as the state-local government joint account.

#### **The State Joint Local Government Account**

Section 149(2) of the 1999 Constitution guaranteed the local government share in the federation account. It reads:

Any amount standing to the credit of the federal and state government and local government councils in each state on such terms in such a manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly.

Sub-section (5) of section 149 requires each state to maintain a state-joint account into which shall be paid all allocations to the local councils from the federation account and from the government of the state.

The constitution further direct the House of Assembly of each state under section 149(7) to prescribe through legislation, the term of which the funds in the account will be distributed among the local government councils of the state (Ale:30).

It is instructive to note that the so called state joint local government account is a mild centralization of local government finance. It is indeed an ill-wind which has never blown well to local government as a tier of government. Many state governments have used the funds accruing from it therefore to create state local joint projects account without express permission of local governments. In situations, where state governments claimed to have obtained such agreement, it seemed from all indications that such permission was extracted under duress.

Indeed the report of a committee on the local government state summarized the negative role of state government in its financial relationship to local governments *inter alia*: (a) Taking away without consultation, some basic functions of local government e.g. markets, motor parks etc. thus reducing the revenue base of local government.

#### **Extra-Budgetary Expenditure**

Perhaps more damaging to the emergency of capacity building at local government level is the issue of extraneous monetary allocation, which local governments are forced to contribute to federal and state

agencies located in their area of jurisdiction, for instance, local governments are funding National Youth Service Corpse (NYSC), Nigeria Police Force (NPF), Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), National Population Commission (NPC), Nigeria Custom Service (NCS), Nigeria Civil Defense Corps (NCDC) etc, in terms of impress and logistic support which require heavy capital outlay over time. The problem being expressed is that most of the afore-mentioned budgetary expenditures have little or no bearing on the locality in the rating of their priority and in most cases are not reflected in the annual budget (Awotokun: 2003). Most state governments are known to have extracted obligatory contribution to the office of the first ladies (Governors Wives) to service their pet projects. The so called pet projects have been used to siphon huge amount of local government funds.

Having, discussed some weakness of the local government system vis- a- vis its emergency as a virile institutions to tackle the endemic poverty in the rural areas, the rest of this work will be devoted to ways and means of ameliorating the deplorable situation.

#### **Way Forward**

As a way of proffering solutions to these multiple questions, it will be instructive, perhaps to ask this pertinent question i.e. how local are local governments in Nigeria as presently constituted? With benefits of hind sight one can (arguably) contend that the present structures at local levels are not local governments in the strict sense of the word.

Indeed, they (local governments) have served over the years as it were under successive governments (military and civilian) as out posts of federal and state government for ease of administration.

Electoral process which at local level would have facilitated capacity building has been largely hijacked and subsequently commercialized. The introduction of capital has alienated members of the various communities from contesting thereby leaving the exercise to their kith and kins who normally migrated to the rural areas for election purposes. In standard democracies all over the world (whether parliamentary or presidential) elections are normally contested based on domicile members of a given constituency. This is very important for two political reasons, namely, one, it guarantee adequate representation of such an area in term of representative being versed with the problems of the people and thereby articulating as appropriate. Secondly it is politically correct, to reward bonifide members of communities with representation. After all, that is the essence of representative democracy in theoretical and practical terms.

Hence in order to strengthen capacity building at local government level, local elections to executive and

legislative must be contested among the domicile political elite. Indeed, there is urgent need to overhaul the electoral laws in the local government system to dignify representative democracy.

A critical review of the present 774 local governments as contained in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shows that they (local governments) are agglomerations of mutually incompatible communities. It is instructive to recall (Mabogunje: 1995) a million dollar questions as to what opportunities for developing dense networks of civic engagements is provided for the citizens in the present system of local government in Nigeria? Given the incongruous amalgam of different communities that a local government area harbors, what stock of social capital is being accumulated, what repertoire of collaborative achievements do our local governments have to show over the years?

The arguments usually built around mandatory demographic consideration of 150,000 – 800,000 (and in most exceptional cases of 100,000) as employed by the 1976 reforms is archaic and anachronistic in nature. With benefit of hindsight, it was military (autocratic) than civil (democratic). It is more for instrumental reasons rather than altruistic purposes.

For capacity building to be strengthened at the local government level, it is reasoned that its creation should be premised in mutual agreement and willingness of the citizens to co-habit rather than on demographic criterion. Hence there could be as many local governments as many communities that have satisfied the conditions of mutual compatibility and evidences of joint communal ventures in the past. Such can be the basis of fashioning a new local government structure for the country.

For institutional capacity building to be engaged at the local level, two or more contiguous local governments can agree to partner in some area of manpower need provided such agreement is well documented to forestall inter-local conflicts arising either from mis-understanding or mischievousness.

When every community in the federation manages its own local government, there will emerge healthy rivalries to out-perform one another. Again, the high incidence of official corruption and venality of both elective and appointed officials of local governments will be drastically reduced to a manageable proportion, if not totally eliminated, as a way of fostering local autonomy every worker will hail from their respective local governments. There have been ample evidences that people do exercise restraints in tempering with communal properties because of social and negative consequences such an action could at-

tract to the culprit immediate and extended families. This scenario has been amply analyzed in (Ekeh: 1995) works titled 'colonialism and the two publics in Africa: A theoretical statement' to necessitate a recap, while members of primordial public (local communities) organize to better the lots of their communities, they use the same energies to pillage the civic public with impunity as presently witnessed in all tiers of governance in Nigeria

### Conclusion

This work wants to conclude on the note that sustainability of capacity building at local government level must be all embracing. It has to take cognizance of human and material resources for it to endure. Secondly, the democratic process at the grassroots must be strengthened through purposive governance, accountability and periodic electoral process to gauge the input and output mechanism of the political institutions (executive and legislative) of the local governments. Presently the Nigeria state needs to do a systemic overhaul of the machinery of governance in order to be able to deliver the dividends of constitutional democracy to all and sundry.

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