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Local Government Administration and Development: A Survey of Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria *(Pp. 148-156)*

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Abstract

The need to escape conditions of underdevelopment by the provision of adequate facilities for its citizenry is the concern of any nation state. It has also been accepted that this is better done by bringing government closer to the people. This underscores the philosophy behind the creation of local governments. In Nigeria however, it is sad to note that local governments have performed far below expectations in the above direction. It is in this wise that this paper takes a survey of the opinions of people in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State. Using simple percentages to analyze responses to questions, the authors found out that though funds available to local governments are grossly inadequate, there is the general impression that the little money made available are directed into private pockets. It is our recommendations that local governments should increase their revenue base and also ensure proper accountability.

Introduction

The quest for development has been a major issue of concern to both domestic and foreign scholars of Nigeria. In fact, the issue has arrested the attention of statesmen, politicians, traditional rulers and the generality of Nigerian populace. Despite the attention however, it is evident that a larger proportion of the Nigerian people are yet to see the indices of development. Majority of Nigerians still live in misery, poverty, squalor, anguish and penury.

It has been argued that development has eluded Nigeria because of a plethora of reasons. This paper is not an attempt to look at all the reasons but to carve out an area. This area is the relationship between local government administration and development with particular emphasis on Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State.

It is generally agreed that the local government is the closest to the people. In fact, a major reason for the establishment of local government is to bring development to the people by bringing the administration closer to the people. The needs of the people at the local level can only be met by a government that is very close to them.

Unfortunately, in Nigeria over the years, these local institutions have largely failed in their responsibilities. Despite attempts to bring government closer to the people by the increase in the number of local governments in the country, the quest for development of these local areas has still not been met. The paper is an attempt to offer reasons for this trend and at the same time offer some tentative suggestions. It is divided into the following subsections.

- Local Government and Development: A Conceptual Exposition
- Local Government Administration in Nigeria: A Short Historical View
- Statement of the Problem
- Research Methodology
- Data Analysis
- Conclusion and Recommendations

Local Government and Development: A Conceptual Exposition

The term local government has been defined variously by different scholars. In the view of a scholar like Wraith, local government refers to locally elected councils whose main purposes is to provide or administer services with as great degree of independence as modern circumstances allow (Wraith, 1964:15-16). For Golding, local government is the management of their own affairs by the people of their locality (Golding, 1959:19).

Some other scholars have attempted to expand on and perhaps give greater expression to the definitions given above. For Sorka, local government connotes the decentralization or dispersion of authoritative decision making where by the authority to make decision is displaced downwards from remote points near the top administration or outward from geographical locations, thus brining authority closer to the people affected by it (Sorka, 1978). In the same vein, Oyediran sees local government as the diffusion of political process on area basis, i.e. local self administration and inclusion of noble ideals of impartiality, protection of minority rights and integrity, all of which are considered essential to the evolution of a liberal democratic society (Oyediran, 1979:171).

Whatever else that may be said, it is clear from the above definitions that a local government in any system is assumed to possess the following characteristics.

- A given territory and population
- An institutional structure for legislative purpose
- A separate legal entity, a range of power and functions authorized by delegation from the appropriate central or intermediate legislation
- Within the Anglo-America tradition, autonomy is limited to common law such as the test of reasonableness (Williams, 1978:39).

For developments, over the years, it has been conceived as a process of economic and social changes with the aim of achieving better life. Only a few analysts have stopped to ask themselves if these changes could be for the worse for some sectors of society and better for others. It is very useful to retain the positive value placed on the term development and see development as first of all the escape of man out of the conditions of exploitation, poverty and oppression (Cockroft, 1970:272) and that

development involves changes in the basic institution and structures of society.

Walter Rodney sees development in human society as many sided process. To him at the level of the individual it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self discipline, responsibility and material well-being. He further argued that some of these indicators are completely moral categories and are very difficult to evaluate. For him at the level of social groups it implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships (Rodney, 1972:9).

Schumpeter disagreed with the mere use of economic indicators as recorded growth of output and income to indicate economic growth. For him the economic growth indicated by such factors or indicators are mere changes in data (quoted in Onyemeluke, 1974:2).

For Todaro (1981:56), development is a multi-dimensional process involving the reorganization and re-orientation of the entire economic and social system. In addition to improvement in income and output, it typically involves radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in particular attitude and in many cases even customs and beliefs.

In Dudley Seer's view, the questions to ask about a country's development are: What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? What has been happening to poverty? If all these have declined from high levels, then no doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result developments; even if per-capita income doubled (Seers, 1972:129).

No matter what may be said about development, it has become clear that the concept of development has undergone profound changes over the years. The very meaning of development has been altered from an almost exclusive pre-occupation with national income to a broader interpretation that encompasses the questions of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

Local Government Administration in Nigeria: A Short Historical View

Local government in Nigeria dates back to pre-colonial era when each of the community was administered as a separate entity. The pre-colonial system administered in Nigeria was very simple and it varied from place to place. Since independence, Nigeria has tried various systems and methods of local government like: the council management system in the former Western Region. The public Service Review Commission testified to this fact when it stated that “the history of local government in Nigeria has been one long episode of trial and error (Public Service Commission Report, 1974).

With the coming of the military in 1966, most of those councils in Southern Nigeria was dissolved, while in the Northern Region, local governments were completely authoritative and corrupt.

In 1976, local governments in Nigeria experienced what we may regard as the biggest revolution in the area with the 1976 local government reforms. The 1976 reform brought a sort of uniformity in the structure of local government throughout the federation. It also corrected the structural defect of the former local government where some too large, others too small and were viable. Ministries were created for local government in all states. Each local government had an administrative head called secretary to the local government.

Since the 1976 reform, another major reform was the 1988 local government reform that was based on the Dasuki Review Committee inaugurated in 1984. In 1988, President Ibrahim Babangida announced the abolition of local government ministries nationwide. He added that with immediate effect, federal disbursement to the local government should be made directly to them to solve the problem of a situation where state governments direct this money to their own use.

The chairman of the local government became the chief executive and accounting officer. Laws and regulations were put in place to enhance full autonomy. In his 1991 budget speech, President Babangida introduced presidentialism into the local government system in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Local governments are established to bring about developments. In Nigeria however, this has not been the case. The paper intends to unravel factors for this trend and offer tentative suggestions.

Research Methodology

The research work used Oredo Local Government Council as a case study. The research design for this study is the survey method. For the purpose of the study the population consists of both inhabitants and workers of Oredo Local Government Area in Edo State. The sampling method was a combination of the stratified random sampling and the simple random sampling. The stratified random sampling was employed for local government works while the simple random sampling method was employed for inhabitants of the local government. On the whole a total of 200 samples were collected.

The research instrument used was the questionnaire. The questionnaire had two sections. Section "A" was for background variables while section "B" contained a few questions needed to unravel the problems of local governments in Nigeria. The questionnaires were administered directly by the researchers and the simple percentage method used to analyze the data collected. The data was collected in December 2010.

Data Analysis

Firstly, let us present the background variables of respondents before we proceed to specific questions.

Interpretation: From the table 1 it can be seen that of the 200 respondents, 110 (55%) were males while 90 (45%) were females. On age, 30 (15%) were below 20 years, 100 (50%) were between 21 and 30 years while 70 (35%) were between 31 and 40 years. On educational qualification, 20 (10%) had only primary education, 70 (35%) had secondary education and 110 (55%) had higher qualification. Finally on residence, 80 (40%) lived in the rural area while 120 (60%) are resident in the urban area.

In order to achieve the aim of this paper, one major preposition was formulated namely: the local government lacks enough funds and therefore cannot meet its developmental responsibilities. In order to ascertain the above, three major questions were asked.

Firstly, the respondents were asked whether they considered the present revenue allocated to local governments and other sources of finance as adequate.

From table 2, it can be seen that of the 200 respondents only 24 representing 12 percent of the total sample agreed that Oredo Local Government Area had enough finances. On the contrary, 160 representing 80 percent of the total

respondents said the local government did not have enough finance while only 16 representing 8 percent indicated “don’t know”.

Also, the respondents were asked whether the funds available to the local government can determine their ability to perform their developmental responsibilities. Their responses are tabulated below.

From table 3 it can be seen that of the 200 respondents 24 answered yes that local government funds determine their ability to provide developmental facilities while 160 representing 80 percent said it does not determine their ability to provide amenities. Only 16 representing 8 percent indicated “don’t know”.

Finally, respondents were asked whether they feel that local government funds are diverted into individual pockets and as such not used for amenities. Their responses are shown below.

Table 4 shows that despite the opinion that local government funds are inadequate, 160 representing 80 percent of the respondents are of the view that the available funds are diverted to individual pockets, while 24 representing 12 percent disagreed to that. Only 16 representing 8 percent indicated “don’t know”.

General Discussion

From the data presented above, the following conclusions are germane:

1. There is the general agreement that funds made available to local government is grossly inadequate if they must effectively and efficiently perform their developmental responsibilities.
2. That the inadequate funds is not solely responsible for the inability of local governments to perform their responsibilities.
3. That the little funds made available to local governments is diverted to individual pockets.

Conclusion/Recommendations

From the analysis, it is clear that Oredo Local Government Council is actually facing financial problems. This financial problem is responsible for its low level performance which hitherto is militating against the proper functioning of the local government council. However, that is not solely the problem. There is the general impression that local government officials are diverting funds meant for developmental purposes to their private pockets. The following suggestions are there imperative.

The local government in a bid to prudently and efficiently manage existing funds, therefore should concern itself with proper and careful feasibility studies of meaningful activities that could yield revenue for the council and investing on those activities. Care should be exercised not to invest in unprofitable or worthless projects.

In addition to the above, it should be concerned actively in the generation of its internal revenue by employing more capable hands in the art of revenue collection in a bid to exhaustively uncover areas left uncovered.

Finally, proper accountability should be maintained by the council as this will reduce the rate of misappropriation of funds by council officials. Regular auditing should also be maintained.

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Table 1: Background Variables of Respondents

Gender		Age			Educational Qualification			Residence	
Male	Female	Below 20	21-30	31-40	Primary	Secondary	Higher	Rural	Urban
110	90	30	100	70	20	70	110	80	120
55%	45%	15%	50%	35%	10%	35%	55%	40%	60%

Table 2: Is Finance Adequate for Local Government?

	Number	Percentage %
Yes	24	12
No	160	80
Don't know	16	08
Total	200	100

Table 3: Performance of Oredo Local Government

	Number	Percentage %
Yes	24	12
No	160	80
Don't know	16	08
Total	200	100

Table 4: Diversion of Funds

	Number	Percentage %
Yes	160	80
No	24	12
Don't know	16	08
Total	200	100