

# Local Government and the Challenges of Community Development in Nigeria: An Insight.

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examined local government and the challenges of community development in Nigeria. Since the inception of local government in Nigeria, it has been a major source of development to the people at the community level. This is proved as the local government is the government nearest to the people at the community level and as such are aware of their needs and problems more than other levels of government. The paper adopted library and documentary research method. The local governments are to see to the provision of water supply, education, health care facilities , parks , enforcement of law and order , etc in the communities. However, there are certain challenges encountered by the local government in the course of executing these functions in communities in Nigeria. Some of these challenges are: Inadequate financial resources , Lack of autonomy , Lack of community participation in the development process and Corruption and with these , a meaningful and sustainable development cannot be achieved . The paper recommends adequate financial resources, local government autonomy and community participation to curb these challenges and enhance effective development in the communities.

**Keywords:** Local government , community , development ,challenges and Nigeria .

## I. INTRODUCTION

Subordinate government, whose existence and power came from laws enacted by a superior government. (Adeyemo, 2005).The existence of Local governments have been recognized as fundamental to rapid socio-political and economic transformation of localities where national and

state governments may not be able to reach argued Ezeh & Muanya (2013). One of the major indexes of social change in Nigeria is rural development, hence, the creation of local government. Among scholars it is believed that no state can boast of having achieved development if a large chunk of her rural inhabitants are still deficient of all elements of development.

This paper examines local government and the challenges of Community development in Nigeria as a universally accepted remedy to solving the problem of underdevelopment in rural areas. Literarily this does not mean that its existence is absolutely the solution but the position of this work is that the creation of local government constitutionally is hinged on sustainability of developmental purposes. Thus the basic rationale behind the creation of local government is to meet the socio-political and economic needs of the people at the grassroots.

Since a large percentage of the population is mostly found at the community level, the development of rural areas cannot be over-emphasized. Thus, development of rural areas impacts positively on per capita income and food production. Development of the community has been the concern of every responsible and responsive government. Yusuf (1999) further stated that community development is the outcome of a series of quantitative and qualitative changes occurring among a given rural population and whose converging effects indicate, in time, a rise in the standard of living and favorable changes in the way of life of the people concerned.

Obiora (2012) advances that Local governments are expected to act as the hinge in the realization of developmental processes as the

closest government to the People. The local governments are therefore, saddled with the responsibility of raising rural productivity and income, diversify rural economy and enhance the welfare of rural dwellers. Since agriculture is the main economic activity in the rural areas, the most effective instrument for the realization of grassroots development has been agricultural programmes. As Olayide (in Zoaka et al. (2010) noted:

The spatial structure of the rural environment and the skills of inhabitants indicate that agriculture constitutes the dominant activities of the population considering that the only readily available resources are land, water and labour. In the light of this, successive governments in Nigeria have shown much interest in agricultural Development through a number of programmes such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN); Green Revolution; River Basin Development Authority (RBDA); among others. The policy documents of these programmes came out clean on what government planned to do for the people without indication of their participation. However, a strategy of grassroots development must place the mobilization of rural communities as the centre piece of development through an integrated approach.

### Local Government

Local government has been defined as: a system of local administration under which local communities and towns are organized to maintain law and order, provide some limited range of social services and public amenities, and encourage the cooperation and participation of the inhabitants in joint endeavours towards the improvement of their conditions of living. It provides the communities with a formal organizational framework which enables them to conduct their affairs effectively and regulate the actions of their members for the general public good (Odenigwe, 1977).

The Layfield Committee in England (1976) identified local governments as agents of democracy, providing a means for the spreading of political power. It also sees this arm of government as necessary for increased accountability and efficiency: accountability because of proximity of decision makers to local population, and efficiency because services could be adjusted to local needs and preferences. It also foresaw the impact of local governments as agents of stabilization - formulating new policies and pioneering new ideas, projects and programmes. Our experience in local administration has however, not attained this laudable goal.

The concept of local government involves a philosophical commitment to democratic participation in the governing process at the grassroots level. This implies legal and administrative decentralization of authority, power and personnel by a higher level of government to a community with a will of its own, performing specific functions as within the wider national framework. A local government is a government at the grassroots level of administration meant for meeting peculiar grassroots need of the people (Agagu, 1997).

### Community Development

Community development is not a new concept, but its existence is in line with human civilization (Ajayi & Otuya, 2006). However, according to Shirley (1979) in Chile (2006), community development began during the history of the social movement and the rise of the ancient Babylon societies since 5,000 years ago. Nevertheless, the process of community development is seen more organized in 1960s (Pitchford & Henderson, 2008). The scholars believe that community development is a combination effect of community built, strengthened and strong support (Matarrita-Cascante, Luloff, Krannich & Field, 2006). But during the industrial and post-industrial era, most community developments were implemented by the model of self-help, technical assistance and conflict (Green, 2008).

Nevertheless, the focus, strategy and approach of community development are uncertain, depending on the blocks of time as being discussed by Henderson (2008). He said that community development can be noticed in the late 1960s through writings and ideas by scholars such as Murray Ross and Eileen Young husband. Community development within that era focused more on top-down approach, i.e. the development is fully implemented by the government. Thus, the community had to accept government's effort. In contrast, in the early 1970s, the demand of society well-being increases with a raise in social work, practiced by the outside society of a community. Both models of conflict and technical assistance in community development's approach are seen more often being used. The changes again took place in 1980s, emphasizing community development based on the capacities of financial and economic.

The United Nations (1955) defines community development broadly as "a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems." International Association for

Community Development (2016) defines it as both a practice based profession and an academic discipline. Following the adoption of the IACD definition in 2016, the association has gone on to produce International Standards for Community Development Practice. The values and ethos that should underpin practice can be expressed as: Commitment to rights, solidarity, democracy, equality, environmental and social justice. The purpose of community development is understood by IACD as being to work with communities to achieve participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, economic opportunity, equality and social justice. This practice is carried out by people in different roles and contexts, including people explicitly called professional community workers (and people taking on essentially the same role but with a different job title), together with professionals in other occupations ranging from social work, adult education, youth work, health disciplines, environmental education, local economic development, to urban planning, regeneration, architecture and more who seek to apply community development values and adopt community development methods. Community development practice also encompasses a range of occupational settings and levels from development roles working with communities, through to managerial and strategic community planning roles. Hamilton (1992) defined community development as a planned and organized effort to assist individuals to acquire the attitudes, skills, and concepts required for their democratic participation in the effective solution of as wide a range of community improvement problems as possible in the order of priority determined by their increasing levels of competence.

Moreland and Lovett (1997) see community development as a learning process that involves people in experiences from which they will learn ways of enhancing their capacity for self-directed activity and destiny. From a social interventionist or animation social view, community development can be described as “the process of animation that gives rise to a process of self-education, the essence of which is a heightening of the capacity for self-determination (Draper, 1971)

Lotz (1977) identified two types of community -- the vertical or geographical one (street, neighbourhood, or reserve), and the horizontal or non-geographical one (teachers, farmers, and social classes). The central concept of community implies territoriality or constituency, which usually leads to the establishment of

boundaries and the monitoring of who crosses them. It is necessary for a community to acknowledge its problems, and need for assistance, before an external agency attempts to ‘come in’ and start a community development process; otherwise, the development worker could be perceived as an “unwarranted intruder”.

### **The Roles of Local Government in Community Development**

In Nigeria, past centralized development efforts embarked upon had resulted into failure to benefit the rural people yet, these people cannot be neglected for its enormity. It has therefore been realized that community development must constitute a major part of a development strategy if a large segment of those in greatest need are to benefit since most programmes embarked upon by the central and state governments. have failed in this areas; then local government becomes the next agent to fall on for development. The roles of local government in community development as in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria are:

**Education:** Local governments through their local education districts have been responsible for the construction, maintenance and staffing of primary schools in their respective areas. Also, it is responsible for the payment of salaries for teaching and non –teaching staff in primary schools.

**Transportation:** The provision of transportation has gone a long way to enhance the status of Nigerian local governments. These local governments have set up diverse mass urban transit scheme to help to transport their staff and also act as a source of revenue generation for local governments.

**Public Toilet:** Local governments are not left out in the maintenance of good hygienic culture. They embark on the construction of public toilet for their people.

**Water Supply:** Local governments embark on digging of bore holes in the rural areas, this has greatly improved the hygiene nature of the people in these rural communities.

**Medical and Health:** These include the provision, maintenance and administration of dispensaries, maternity and health centres. The increase in the revenue allocation to local governments has been helping in the maintenance of these medical and health services.

**Law Enforcement:** Customary courts of Grades A, B and C and setup indifferent local government areas. These courts deal with Civil cases such as divorce, defaulters and issuing of certificate of marriage Nehru (1996) emphasized the role of local

government as the basis of any true system of democracy. According to him, the role of local government includes the following;

**Grass-root democracy:** Local government provides scope for democracy at the grass –root level. If direct democracy can still be practicable, it is only at this level, otherwise democracy at the state or national level has become only indirect type.

**Serves as a Training School:** Local government is an excellent ground for creating and training future leaders. The participation of people at the local level in the management of their own affairs, gives them necessary experience to handle bigger affairs later at the state or national level.

**Encourages participation of the people in public affairs:** Local government affords opportunity to the people to participate in public affairs. It has become impracticable for common people to participate in public affairs at the state or national level.

**Reduces the burden of the central government:** Local government in a way acts supplementary to the central government. No doubt historically the local government is prior to the state or national government, but with the passage of time many important functions got transferred to the central government.

**Serves as a channel of communication:** The local government serves as two-way channel of communication between itself and the central government .Desires and aspirations of the local community are articulated and carried upward to the state government, and plans and programmes of the state and the central governments flow in the reverse direction.

**Vital for national progress:** Local government promotes diversity of experience and creative activity through democratic action. Thus, it contributes to national progress through resilience, strength and richness democracy.

#### **Challenges of Local Government in Community Development**

Several factors hinder effective participation of local government in community development. These factors include social inequality, inadequate financial resources , economic inequality, poverty , corruption and the Nigerian factor, lack of social amenities , lack of community participation in the development process , lack of autonomy , excessive politicking at the local level, lack of qualified politicians , misplacement of priorities etc.

**Inadequate financial resources:** Lack of dependable revenue base is a critical factor that has bedeviled the efforts of most local governments in community development . As Odo (2014) observed

, even though one of the criteria for creating local governments as provided by the 1976 local government reform guidelines was the issue of viability , most local governments created since then have come to be solely dependent on their statutory allocations from the federation account to run their affairs . Although the revenue accruing to the local governments from the federation account has been increasing over time , the cash flow has not been correspondingly constant . this is because the federal government revenue is dependent on the sale of crude oil at the international market. Since most of the local governments depend entirely on federal allocations to run their affairs, the fluctuations in the country's earning from oil has adversely affected their performance in service delivery to the people at the community level.

**Lack of autonomy:** The local governments suffer from constant whittling down of their powers by the state governments. The excessive control of some local governments by the state has reduced them to local administration or local arms of state administration. This has greatly impeded the performance of the local government in community development as they have to work according to the dictates of the state governments . The practice is contrary to the spirit and the letter of the 1976 local government reforms, which stipulated in its guidelines that local governments should do precisely what the word government implies i.e. governing at the local level.(FRN , 1976).

**Lack of community participation in the development process:** Development is about people and if it is to be meaningful, the people must be its active agent and not just passive beneficiaries (Odo, 2012). Many development projects in the local governments failed due to non-involvement of the local communities in the conception, design and implementation of such projects . As Odo (2012) noted:

Any development which marginalizes the contributions of the primary beneficiaries could hardly make serious impact on the lives of the people including lack of sustainability. This is because the local communities which could have owned the programme and continued from where the government stopped are from the levels of conception, design and implementation excluded.

**Corruption:** In Nigeria, corruption is rife in both public and private life. Most Nigerians see official positions in or outside government as avenues for self - enrichment, an opportunity to get rich overnight. Corruption has therefore, deprived many local government councils the needed resources for development. Corruption manifests at the local government level through the award of inflated

contracts to cronies for projects, which may either not be executed or abandoned once the contractor is paid huge percentage of the contract sum as mobilization fee. Corruption is also perpetuated at the local governments through the dubious expenses in the form of duty tour claims, hospitality allowances, financial assistance etc. Through these means, large quantum of the local government resources is siphoned by both elected and career officials of the local government.

### The Way Forward

The following recommendations are suggested as solutions to the challenges of local government in their effective participation of community development.

**Adequate Financial Resources:** The local government should have adequate financial resources to meet their developmental objectives especially at the community level. They should also exercise a high level of discipline in the management of their finances as having adequate finance does not automatically translate to development except with prudent and judicious utilization.

**Local Government Autonomy:** The state government should their grip of control over local government including arbitrary dissolution of elected local government councils by the state government for varying political reasons. The local government should be granted meaningful autonomy in the conduct of their affairs. This will make the local government to respond effectively to the demands for efficient service delivery at the community level.

**Community participation:** The community members should be made to participate in all critical stages of decision making from problem identification, project formulation, resource mobilization and implementation, to monitoring and evaluation. This would ensure that the problems addressed are the priorities of the affected communities.

## II. CONCLUSION

This paper examined the Local government and the challenges of community development in Nigeria. These challenges both politically, economically, technologically, financially and socially has impeded the performance of the local government in community development in Nigeria. However, it has proffered solutions to improve the ability of the local government in rendering their services to the people at the community level. It is worthy to note that the local governments have important

functions to carry out both in the communities and in Nigeria at large.

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