

Full Length Research

Contemporary Political Issues Responsible for Poor Local Governance in Nigeria

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This research examined contemporary political issues responsible for poor local governance in Nigeria. It assessed how alternative solution to these issues can be achieved. The quantitative research methodology was adopted in conducting the research. Lack of autonomy which local government councils in Nigeria are suffering from was discovered as one of the contemporary political issues responsible for poor local governance in the country. Independent local government system as this research recommended is one of the possible alternatives to addressing the problem of poor local governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Governance, Issues, Local, Political and Poor

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria boast of 774 local government areas spread across 36 states in six geo-political zones as well as a federal capital territory with 5 area councils located within it. One of the basic idea for this decentralize structure of governance to me premise on the need to take governance closer to the people at the grassroots levels and also bring them closer to the government at the central and regional levels. Considering the vast land mass and population of the country without government at the local level, majority of the people especially in rural communities across the country would find it difficult to feel the impacts of government at the region and center as a result of disconnected administrative pattern and structure which this may have created. Government is actually for the people, and this is one of the basic reasons why it has to exist and operates with full autonomy where the people live. Authority given from outside the domain where people exist is indirectly a kind of absentee governance which local administration

operate to correct. Local level is where people exist, therefore government in this area of administrative council deserve enough independence to be able to deliver good local governance to the people at the grassroots level.

Local government is a specific institution or entity created by national or state constitutions. It can also be created by ordinary legislation of higher level of central government or even by executive order, provincial or state legislation to deliver a range of specified services to a relatively small geographically delineated area. Therefore, it is the formulation of collective action at the local level in pursuance of collective actions. It is not just about providing a range of local services but also of preserving the life and liberty of residents leading to the creation of space for democratic participation and civic dialogue as well as supporting environmentally sustainable development which in returns enrich the quality of residents' life (Shah, 2016). Though local

government is a handmaiden of higher government but then in fiscal federalism perspective, local government is treated as a subordinate tier in a multi-tiered system. In dual federalism, as Ranney (2016) wrote, local government is an extension of state government. While in co-operative federalism Almond (2016) submits that local government is equal partner with higher-level government. But in exceptional cases, Junaidu (2014) and Nwabueze (2015) believes that local government is the main source of sovereignty and have constitutional significance than the federal government.

In unitary states, Appadurei (2015) asserts that local government act on behalf of the central government while in federal states Venkatarangaiya (2012) affirmed that local government exist and operate as an independent authority as higher levels of government. Local government to me is a facilitator of network forms of local governance. But then, federalism in another aspect is contextual. It can be co-operative, dual or even fiscal in some cases. Nigeria's brand of federalism to me is a federated union in which three levels of government are bounded in a mutual relationship of sharing revenue to deliver good governance at three different levels of authorities. This simply implies how independent each government is in the area of utilizing its share of revenue in delivering good governance to its people. The structure also defines how independent the three levels of authorities are in so long as there are clear demarcations of areas of administrative jurisdictions. For example, defense, communication, internal and external affairs among other are exclusively reserved as matters of the central government while central, state and local authorities can act on concurrent issues like health, education, water supply among others within their respective areas of administrative jurisdictions.

Unitary structure and parliamentary system of government inherited from colonial administration ended in 1966 shortly after the termination of the first republic government by military intervention. And since then, all regimes we have had in the country showed their willingness towards strengthening the federal form and presidential system of government in the country. Though, central and state governments operate with maximum autonomy to a reasonable extent. But the reason why local government been the third level and closer to the people still have no clearly defined independence of operation under this system especially in relation to how it receive, keep and spend its own share of allocation from the federation income is what we cannot actually understand till date. Although, under military regimes we have had, this problem of lack of fiscal independent of local government does not exist. But since May 1999 that civil rule was established in the country, complains of lack of independent local government system especially in relations to fiscal allocation management from federation income keep

growing without sign of coming to an end. Part of the purpose of this research is to ameliorate this shortcoming. And it is one of the basis that justify the takeoff of this research.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In Nigeria today, complain of local government autonomy keep growing like a burning fire which can hardly be quench. As a nation in which three levels of government exist under a federated union sharing income that accrue to the federation many expect government at the local level to utilize its own share of allocation like both central and state governments in infrastructural and human development so as to improve positively, the living conditions of the people at the grassroots level. But this is merely an aspirations which is proving difficult to achieve due to what many conceived as lack of autonomy of local government in the country. Improve condition of living or good things which life meaningful like pipe bone water supply, schools, and motor able roads as well as others such as hospitals and effective poverty alleviation program among others are in gross shortage in several communities across the 774 local government areas in Nigeria. In some others, they do not even exist talk less of been in shortage. This has continued to lead to the rise of questions concerning where and on what projects are local government allocations from the federation income been invested. In addition to these problems, several others still owe workers' salaries for several months despite the fact that monthly allocation from federation account has never stopped. These all bow to the issue of autonomy which many believes local government lacks and other political issues which seems to be affecting the delivering of good governance at the local level. This research seeks to examine some of these issues which has been truncating good local governance in Nigeria with a view to make recommendations which would ameliorate the problems of poor local governance in the country.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research raised and answered a number of questions. Basic among which include:

1. What are contemporary political issues responsible for poor local governance in Nigeria?
2. How does these political issues contribute to poor local governance in the country?
3. And through which means can these political issue be addressed and good local governance established across Nigeria?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research are:

1. To examine the contemporary political issues responsible for poor local governance in Nigeria.
2. Assess how these political issues contribute to poor local governance in the country.
3. And to find out means through which these political issues can be addressed so that good local governance can be established across Nigeria.

LITERATURE PERSPECTIVES

Political Science is relatively clear that local governments must meet certain basic requirements if they are to be able to solve problems effectively. They must be able to identify problems, set priorities, mobilize resources, implement programs, evaluate results learn from those results, and maintain popular legitimacy. At the very least, they must have a defined area and population, be of reasonable size, have authority and resources proportionate to the problems they face, and be working institutions that make decisions and enforce accountability and be open to widespread political participation, and have a stable set of rules to organize local affairs. Achieving these is essential if local governance is to be considered operational (Ostrom, 2013, Olowu and Wunsch, 2015). Local governments in Nigeria have definite territory and population. Their areas of administrative jurisdictions are clearly defined. They offer widespread political participation, laws relating to tax collections are enforced and established rules of affairs exist. But the extents to which these rules are followed and accountability maintained are debatable issues in local governance in Nigeria. Those vested with the responsibility of making rules for the people at the local level are in most cases accused of being the violators of rules made by themselves. External interference created by political issues often result in tempering with local resources but then, local government officials have in some other cases come under severe allegations of corruption. And this also affects the extent of accountability in the administration of local governments in Nigeria.

Problems in local political environment and local institutional design coupled with weak leadership combined to create poor and inappropriate reward structures and lack of accountability which today Olowu (2015) observes make local governance ineffective in Nigeria. The generally non-existent or ineffectiveness of allocated grants make resources attractive to those who have the position and influence to capture them. All these as Wunsch (2010) rightly submits add to the problems

which keep local politics game close or even shrunken, and reduced the opportunities for the grassroots to get involved in local politics and governance in Nigeria. Funds are allocated from the top down in an opaque process further reduces the incentives for grassroots persons to follow local politics. This represent the impact of, and an expansion of what many considered as the "neo-patrimonial" politics of the center to local government in Nigeria today.

The vitality of local governance in Nigeria is decreased by what Wunsch (2010) considered as absence of requirements for local fund raising or cost return. This is because little money is raised or recovered locally, so the resource based of local government is proportionately reduced. Bulk of what local government depend on to deliver good governance at the local level in Nigeria is expected to be generated from the statutory allocation from the federation income. Therefore, with fewer resources, the effective authority local governments have remains small and does not impact on peoples living conditions at the grassroots level. Improve living conditions at the grassroots level is an essential requirement for national growth and development. In fact Bello (2013) posits that: "Local government constitutes the most critical level of government at which the momentum to sustain national development can be created". To some countries in the third world, it is the only semblance of authority known beyond the tradition. Although this notion is gradually been eroded from the minds of the Nigerian people owing to the fact that all regimes the nation has had after independence show commitment to strengthening federalism and decentralization of powers.

Decentralization to locally elected governments has recently become popular as a means to improve incentives of public providers for service delivery to poor people. Nigeria is one of the few countries in the developing world to have significantly decentralized both fiscal and service delivery responsibilities, on how locally elected governments actually function in delivering basic services to their citizens, there are evidence of limited accountability at local levels, specifically reflected in the non-payment of salaries, development cannot be explained by appealing to lack of resources available to local governments (Khemani, 2016). Local governance is the prerogative of local government in Nigeria. At the local governance level, if human development is to be ensured and sustained, those who run affairs at this level of governance must constantly work towards achieving the six basic pillars of human development listed by the UNDP (Aremu, 2016). These pillars as Ademolekun (2016) pointed out include: equity, sustainability, productivity, empowerment, co-operation and security. Most of these basic requirements for improve condition of living are inadequate in local governance today. In some other cases, they do not even exist.

The problem of local governance in Nigeria has been a recurring decimal in the political history of the country. Local government started in Nigeria started during the colonial era when it was vested in traditional rulers and it operated in a very undemocratic manner. Over the years, efforts have been made to democratize local government and make it more responsive to the developmental needs of the people at the grassroots level (Igbuzor, 2009). But what to me sounds as a repressive policies against the third tier of government has continued to make it difficult to the developmental needs of the people at the grassroots to be achieved in Nigeria. Although, Gale (2008) argued that this is because local government is at the bottom of the pyramid of governmental institutions. This to me is not an excuse or issue. In several other places or cases where local government exist at the bottom of both the federal and state governments, it has been active in the delivering of good and responsive governance at the local level. Daniels (2013) conceived local government as an authority often referred to as the closest to the people. And this to me is even one of the reasons why local government is supposed to deliver good governance to the people because it is saddled with the governance and development of a small geographic area which are known as cities or towns. In some countries, such cities or towns are referred to as counties.

In Nigeria, the local government reforms aimed both to accelerate development and to enable the local population participate and hold those in power accountable for their governance roles. Local governments are created with the ultimate goal of bringing government closer to the people at the grassroots. However, a true third tier of has never taken off in the governance structure of Nigeria, despite the widespread endorsement of local government as potent system to mobilize people for local participation in governance, Nigerian local government system today suffers poor funding, corruption, poor service delivery and paucity of human capital (Abdulhamid and Chima, 2015). These issues I have consistently pointed out from the beginning of this research. Nigeria`s federalism is a type which local government autonomy can hardly be noticed. It may not be wrong to even assume if local government in Nigeria is a true third tier of government. Even if it is, then it is only in theory. What exist to me, is an extension of regional, provincial or state government at the community level. Local government in Nigeria is more or less an agent of state government at the local level. This is why its independence as a tier of government at the local level can hardly be felt by people at the grassroots. In several cases, stategovernment presence is even more felt at the local level than that of the local government. It is therefore difficult for an authority that lack autonomy in its area of jurisdiction to deliver good governance within a range of territory it is serving as an

agent or care taker to state government.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted with the used of quantitative research methodology. Primary source of data collection instrument was utilized in the research. Closed ended questionnaire was designed and administered to 120 respondents chosen from 6 local government areas in the 6 geo-political zones of Nigeria. In each of these zones, 1 local government was selected. And in each of the local government areas selected, 5 local government council staff and 15 non local government staff were selected. Each of the 6 local government areas selected is represented by 20 respondents. And all of the respondents were chosen using the random sampling technique. In north east Gombe local government was selected, Zaria local government was chosen in North West, Karu local government from north central, Owerri local government in south east, Ogbomosho local government from south west and Southern Ijaw local government area for the south-south region. The questionnaires were personally administered to the chosen respondents by the Researcher who waited as they were completed and retrieved them back instantly from the respondents. All questionnaires administered were retrieved back completely and successfully by the Researcher. The questionnaires were administered separately that is on different days in the six chosen local government areas.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Below is the presentation of the data collected by the Researcher (Table 1):

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data presented above shows that 5% of the respondents agreed that political issues does not contribute to poor local governance in Nigeria, only 2% of them strongly agreed with this view but 10% of them were undecided on it while 45% disagreed and 40% strongly disagreed with it. It is also clear from the presentation above that 48% of the respondents agreed that infrastructural development such as pipe bone water supply, electricity, motor able roads, hospitals, schools as well as job creation and effective poverty alleviation measures are some of the features and attributes of good local governance in Nigeria. Also, 47% strongly agreed with this position while only 5% of the respondents were undecided on this issue. Table 1 also shows that only 10% of the respondents were undecided on the issue that

Table 1: Contemporary Political Issues Responsible for Poor Local Governance in Nigeria

S/n	Questions or Variables	A	SA	U	D	SD
1	Political Issues does not contribute to Poor Local Governance in Nigeria.	5%	2%	10%	45%	40%
2	Infrastructural Development such pipe bone water supply, electricity, motor able roads, hospitals, schools as well as job creation and effective poverty alleviation measures are attributes of good local governance in Nigeria.	48%	47%	5%	0	0
3	Lack of truly independent local government system, joint account syndrome, existence of state electoral commission, corrupt politicians, politics of Godfathers, unpatriotic and indiscipline council officials are not part of the contemporary political issues responsible for poor local governance in Nigeria.	0	0	10%	40%	50%
4	Independent local government system, single independent account by local government council, abolishment of state electoral commission, non-corruptible politicians, absence of politics of Godfathers, patriotic and discipline council officials are some of the required means for facilitating good local governance in Nigeria.	50%	45%	5%	0	0

Source: Field Survey (2017)

lack of independent local government system, joint account syndrome, existence of state electoral commission, corrupt politicians, politics of Godfathers, unpatriotic and indiscipline council officials are not part of the contemporary political issues responsible for poor local governance in Nigeria, 40% of them disagreed with the view and 50% strongly disagreed with it. Independent local government system, maintenance of single independent account, abolishment of state electoral commission, non-corruptible politicians, absence of politics of Godfathers, patriotic and disciplined council officials according to 50% of the respondents are some of the required means for facilitating good local governance in Nigeria, 45% of them strongly agreed with this point but only 5% of them were undecided on it. Below is the discussion of the results of the data presented above by the Researchers.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Data presented and analyzed above made numerous issues very cleared on local governance in Nigeria. Political issues are part of the major causes of poor governance at the local level in the country. Infrastructural development such as pipe bone water supply, electricity, motor able roads, hospitals, schools, as well as job creation opportunities and effective poverty alleviation measures which are lacking in several local government areas in Nigeria are actually part of what good governance entails and requires at the local level. Absence of these at the grassroots level amount to nothing other than poor local governance. These contemporary political issues themselves which have contributed to poor local governance in the country today

are nothing other than the problems created by issues like lack of independent local government system, undying problem of joint account syndrome, existence of state electoral commission often manipulated by some state governors to plant their boys who they can control as local government chairmen, corrupt politicians who often conceived funds meant for local government as funds from which to better their lots by seeking contracts they never in the real sense execute, politics of Godfathers which also made it possible for governors to plant only their loyalist as chairmen of local government and dictate what to do and how to do them as well as some unpatriotic and indiscipline local government staff who never see reason in infrastructural development at the grassroots level. Since 1999 that democracy was established in Nigeria, several state governors have forced local governments into maintaining joint account with them-development that made it possible for them to channeled local government funds into executing state projects while local governments are left with the duty of paying only salaries without funds for capital development. In fact, even salaries, some local governments cannot pay as they are still owing their workers several months salaries talk less of executing capital projects. Independent local government system backed up by constitutional provisions, abolishment as a matter of must the issue of joint account in some state, abolishment of state electoral commission which are governors agency of planting their boys at the local levels, change of ideology away from politics of Godfathers and patriotic as well as disciplined local government staff as the presentations and analysis above rightly posits are part of the urgently required measures to free local government in Nigeria from the problem of poor governance.

FINDINGS

The Researchers arrived at the following findings:

1. Political issues contribute to poor local governance in Nigeria.
2. Lack of infrastructural development as well as job creation and absence of effective poverty alleviation measures are attributes and features of poor local governance in Nigeria.
3. Lack of truly independent local government system, joint account syndrome, existence of state electoral commission, corrupt politicians, politics of Godfathers, unpatriotic and indiscipline local government officials are some of the contemporary political issues responsible for poor local governance in Nigeria.
4. Independent local government system, lack of joint account between states and local governments, abolishment of state electoral commission, non-corruptible politicians, deviation from politics of Godfathers, patriotic and discipline local government officials as this research found out are some of the urgently required measures for solving the problem of poor local governance in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is urgent need to revisit the local government reform acts adopted in Nigeria with a view to making necessary amendment which will guarantee the existence of truly independent local government system free from state and federal interruption and control especially in relations to how local government allocations from federation income are to be kept or utilized. This will also ameliorate the problem of joint account syndrome tying down several local governments in the country from developing infrastructures to improve the living conditions of people at the grassroots levels.

State electoral commission should be abolished in Nigeria. The national electoral commission should be charged with the responsibility of conducting elections for all elective positions from the national level down to the local government levels. This will reduce drastically manipulation by some state governors in planting their boys and people they can control on maintaining joint account and dictating how funds for local governments should be utilized as chairmen. It will also to a larger extent reduce the problem of Godfathers politics. The issue of state governors directing chairmen at local levels to award contract and pay completely instantly for contracts which are never even executed in the first place will also be solved. At least this will drag out many local governments from the difficulty of not been able to pay

salaries or to only pay salaries without executing capital projects to improve the living conditions of the people at the grassroots levels.

Finally, the Researcher strongly recommends that, anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria like EFCC and ICPC be given full backing in their war against corruption. Well motivated police force and independent judicial system free from political influence and manipulation to me are also needed to make the fight against corruption successful. This will raid the country of corrupt politicians and also result in patriotism and discipline on the parts of some local government council officials who are fun of infiltrating vouchers with names of ghost workers and other forms of nonchalant attitudes towards official duties.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the fact that this research succeeded in examining the contemporary political issues responsible for poor local governance in Nigeria and assessed the extent to which these issue are affecting the improvement of living conditions of people at the grassroots level in the country, the Researcher encourage future Researchers not to concentrate on issue that lead to poor local governance in Nigeria anymore. Future research should pay much and greater attention to repositioning and restructuring local government for good local governance in Nigeria.

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