

Prospects and Challenges of Local Government Administration in Nigeria: A Review of Igbo-Etiti Local Government Administration in Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The governance of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is constitutionally structured on a three-tier system of government – the Federal, the State and the Local government. The study centres on the challenges and prospects of local government administration in Nigeria with specific interest in the Igbo-Etiti Local government. There are multivariate challenges facing the administration of local government Areas in Nigeria. This is quite critical because the local government areas constitute and impact on the critical mass of the demographic integrity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The study identified the primary challenges to include paucity and gross mismanagement of LG funds, lack of due diligence, critical mass of unskilled workforce, poor implementation of work ethics and indiscipline, government undue interference in LG affairs, pervasive unproductive bureaucratic models and in many places the whimsical and undemocratic process of LG Chairmanship and Council elections. The study recommends urgent overhaul and transformative reform of LG administration in Nigeria in the spirit and letter of 1976 LG Reform to ensure prosperity, effectiveness and efficiency of LG administration, improve the overall national core welfare of rural-urban dwellers; there should be due separation of powers in the tiers of government, routine and well designed capacity building for workforce and hierarchy of LGs, due and constitutional process of LG elections, tenure elongation for LG hierarchy and overall timely and proper funding of the 774 LGs in Nigeria, routine anti-corruption monitoring and evaluation of the critical projects of LG especially in Igbo-Etiti et cetera.

Key word: Local government • Prospects and challenges • Transformative reform • Igbo-Etiti

INTRODUCTION

The governance of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is constitutionally structured on a three-tier system of government – the Federal, the State and the Local Government. There are 774 Local Government Areas in the country which characterized the history of state creation and rapid socioeconomic expansion of the Nigerian state in the aftermath of the Nigerian civil war in the 1970s-1990s. The continued development of the Nigerian state led to rapid creation and development of the third tier of government to promote greater delivery of political goods and dividends to the increasing population. The 1976 Local Government (LG) Reform was an obvious outcome of the intercostals union between the state and Local Government.

The Local Government reform of 1976 was not only historical, radical, responsive but overwhelmingly popular. It streamlined the political economy of local government system in Nigeria. Some of the critical features include powers to perform and function as an administrative, legislative and semi-judicial system; power to formulate policies, collect and control taxation within its political boundary, exercise reasonable control over staff, preparation of a budget and perform such other specific duties as may be vital for the democratization of the peoples and delivery of good governance to the common people. According to Abutudu [1] not minding that the 1976 Local Government reforms granted power and measurable autonomy, Local Government have herculean task to ensure the continued existence and constitutionality to the lives and livelihood of rural-urban

peoples. To perform its duties equitably and sufficiently, Section 7 (6) of the 1999 Constitution provides that: (a) the Houses of Assembly of states shall make provisions for statutory allocation of public revenue to Local Government councils within the state and (b) The National Assembly shall make provisions of statutory allocations of public revenue to Local Government councils in the federation. These promote and enhance Local Government administration in Nigeria and Igbo-Etiti specifically. The question is to ascertain the extent of popularity of local government system in Igbo-Etiti, what challenges, what prospects? The discourse is schemed to identify and critically examine the basic challenges, milestone and outcomes of local government administration in Igbo-Etiti as performance indicators of LG system in Nigeria. It is then important to establish the framework of understanding into the philosophy, vision and mission of government at the grassroots. Such contextual framework is aimed at unifying definitional nuances while advancing knowledge into the criticality of local government system founded by central government for the people and people for government in a somewhat matrix of affective relationship.

Basic Discourse on Local Government Administration

Local Government: Although definitions are varied as to the concept of Local Government as a system of government, it is generally perceived as the third-tier of government primarily instituted to bring governance to the grassroots. Essentially it is a kind of interactive and peopled governance, a synergy, integral and citizen-focused kind of government administration for regional development. According to Achimugu *et al.* [2] Local government is the third tier of government lower than the central, regional levels, established by rules to exercise political authority through a representative council within the local area. Impliedly, Local government is central and representative government at the lowest strata created for administrative convenience and people-centre development machinery of central government. Adeyemi [3] argues that it is popularly elected bodies charged with executives and administrative duties in issues concerning the inhabitants of a particular place. These elected authorities advance the core welfare and policy plan of central government and the people at the local level. The Nigeria 1976 Guideline for Local Government Reform posits that local government are established by law to exercise specific powers within the local place and/or initiate and direct the provision of government services, determine and execute government projects and businesses for the people in the

defined geopolitical area. In this vein, Local government is understood in this discourse as not only geostrategic, localized but essentially geopolitical.

Local Government Administration: In the context of administration, Adeyemi [4] opine that local government is a subdivision of national and state governments with powers and authority to make local decisions and bye-laws on matters that affect local communities. It is also designed and enabled to mobilize local resources for execution of government policy initiatives. In this regard, Local government is perceived as the basic machinery for continuation and advancement of government plans and objectives for mutual benefits. Agagu [5] perceive it as a form of deconcentration in which all lower levels of government within a country are agents and advocates of the national authority, usually the executive branch and are directly responsible to a central government or chief executive of the local government area. The essence of local administration is to reach to the local dwellers, meet their needs and ensure integral government presence in the community; after all government is a contractual relationship to serve the people at all times.

Igbo-Etiti Local Government Council: Igbo Etiti Local Government Council was established in the aftermath of the creation of Enugu state in 1991 from the old Anambra State of Nigeria. It has a define juridical and geostrategic area covering about 325 km² and bounded to the East by Isi-Uzo Local Government Area, Uzo Uwani LGA on the West, Enugu East and Udi LGAs on the South and Nsukka LGA on the North. As such, it is situated geographically in the Enugu North Senatorial District of Enugu State with headquarters in Ogbede.

Administratively, while Igbo Etiti Local Government Council governs and executes public affairs of the LGA, the Legislative Council which is constituted by twenty (20) councilors makes laws governing the entire jurisdiction in line with the state. The Council is presided by an executive Chairman who is elected on a two-year renewable term in the first instance. According to 2006 National population census, Igbo Etiti LGA is 208,333, with 105,262 males and 103,071 females spread across the twenty wards that make up the Council area. The wards constitute the following geopolitical zones: Aku I, Aku ii, Aku iii, Aku iv, Aku v (Idueme), Diogbe/Umunko, Ejuoha/Udeme, Ekwegbe I, Ekwegbe ii, Ikolo/Ohebe, Ohaodo I, Ohaodo ii, Onyohor/Ochima/Idoha, Ozalla I, Ozalla ii, Ukehe I, Ukehe ii, Ukehe iii, Ukehe iv and Ukehe v with a councilor representing each ward ¹.

Theoretical Framework: Theorization structures intellectuality. It creates the foundational, logical and empirical sequence necessary for assumption and/or disputation. The essence of conceptual framework is to structure analysis methodically and discursively, to create the framework of understanding of rigorous scientific issues and to analysis issues to their barest form of understanding. In the context of Local government administration, theorization is diverse, intense and critical. Scholars, public administrators and theorists generate diverse trail of macro thinking on many sociocultural, normative, economic and political challenges battering the *raison d'être*, functionality, capacity and efficiency of Local government administration. The logic of these disputations galvanizes the theoretical models for priming local governance and public administration which include development model, service-efficiency and Democratic participatory models.

In this study, service-efficiency model is considered as functional baseline for measuring and evaluating overall administrative capacity and interoperation capability to mete targets and executive milestones that directly impact on the sustainable livelihood and core welfare of the common people who increasingly occupy greater democratic space. The extent of service delivery in the local governments foretells the impact and understanding of government among the citizenry. It is the standard gauge for measuring competence, performance, expeditious delivery of democratic goods, milestones and achievements of the fiscal expenditure. Service provides and is the practical expression of and/or yardstick for determining good or bad governance essentially. Local Government administration is thus established to transformatively provide citizen-centred and citizen-focus services in the conduct of government businesses especially in the rural-urban areas. As Obasanjo observed: "Public offices are the shopping floor for government business. Regrettably, Nigerians have for too long been short-changed by the quality of public service delivery by which decisions are not made without undue outside influence and files do not move without being pushed with inducements. Our public offices have for too long been showcases for the combined evils of inefficiency and corruption, whilst being impediments to effective implementation of government policies. Nigerians deserve better. And we will ensure they get what is better!" [6] argue the view of Agba *et al.* [7] that the principal focus of local government administration and ipso facto Igbo-Etiti LG centres on the provision of social services to the people living in the area. Such services may include maintenance of law and order, primary

education, sanitation, electricity, schools, health care services, good market, construction and reconstruction of roads, construction and maintenance of recreational facilities, provision of pipe-borne water and more auspiciously provision and delivery of efficient and proactive security service and/or community policing. Service-efficiency school argues that negation of such primary services questions the essence of a local government who exist to serve the people.

In Nigeria for instance with 774 Local government Councils out of 36 states and FCT, the impact of local government administration is enormous. Leveraging on the proximity of LGs to the people than the Federal and state governments, Local government administration can provide efficient and effective services to locals and residents because of its direct contact with the people than other tiers of government. There are also certain functions which state and the federal government may not be able to provide the grassroots; such is the duty of local government administration to fill the gaps while addressing critical needs of the populace. They are expected to provide environment for capacity building and entrepreneurship, gender empowerment, political socialization and participation, acculturate democratization and mitigate rural-urban migrations. The efficiency and effectiveness of local government councils invariably translates to overall national growth and development. The study as such examines the protracted challenges facing local government administration in Nigeria taking the instance of Igbo Etiti council area.

Challenges of Local Government Administration in Igbo-Etiti:

There are many problems inhibiting the effective and efficient administration in Igbo-Etiti local Government since its creation. An in-depth study shows these challenges consistently hindered the achievement of the desired goals and purpose of establishing local government administration in Igbo-Etiti. A research conducted by Appadorai [8] on the effective service delivery in local government administration in Nigeria highlighted basic institutional problems of local government to include: (a) administrative/political problems such as laziness to work, lack of technical and skilled manpower (b) problem of unionism in addressing worker welfare and development (c) lack of funding and undue state interference. Other factors include, corruption, the problem of leadership, question of autonomy, poor staff attitude and condition of service, staff performance and short electoral office tenure inter alia.

Corruption: It is the bane of effective and efficient functioning of local government administration in Igbo-Etiti. Like most LGs in Nigeria, corruption is deep into the fabrics of the system. Bello-Imam and Roberts [9] cited in Bolatito and Ibrahim [10] noted that, at the bottom level of government, corruption has been canonically welcomed, nurtured, celebrated and entertained within the system. In the local government setting, corruption is endemic and widespread and constitutes one of the greatest threats to local government growth and development. For example, most communities in Igbo-Etiti Local government administration are not well impacted with sufficient political benefits as evident in poor infrastructural facilities and the living standard of the generality of the people despite the quantum of monthly federal allocation and internally generated revenues since the 1990s. This has made the vision of development in Igbo-Etiti a mere dream, ingrained citizen apathy to local government and rendered critical citizen-centred project in serious jeopardy.

Attitude to Work: Absenteeism and redundancy constitute another grey factor affecting overall productivity at the local government. Regular visits to the local government revealed that most of the workers were always absent in the office for private businesses at Nkwo Ogbede and Eke Aku markets thereby abandoning their primary duty at the local Government. This has ingrained poor attitude to work, cronyism and favoritism in work places. There is no maximum enforcement of the code of conduct and work ethics to deter such unethical infractions. The consequences are enormous, poor service delivery or no delivery at all; citizens apathy to public government, protracted bureaucratic quagmire and unnecessary waste of scarce resources in time and bribery.

Lack of Fund: Finance is the bedrock of productivity and efficiency. Inadequate funding have crippled and rendered the development in Igbo-Etiti local government administration impotent. This has stalled lots of local government projects and good initiatives. Chukwuemeka *et al.* [11] argues that it is common knowledge in Nigeria that the statutory allocations and grants from the federal and state governments to councils are grossly insufficient; the challenge is increased by the little revenue generation capacity of the council. The situation is exacerbated by the continued sundry deductions by the central and regional governments from their monthly allocations. Moreover, the inability of most regional governments to oblige their monthly statutory obligations

to local government by outright refusal to remit 10% internally generated revenue accrued to the state monthly. In some conditions, it has become so desperate that many local government councils cannot pay staff salaries not to mention the provision of basic needs².

More so, the issue of State-local government joint account contributed to lack of fund to run the administration in Igbo-Etiti. This is because the fund that is accrued to local government administration are deducted and most times siphoned by the state government. Section 162, 5 and 6 of the Nigerian constitution of 1999 provides for the channeling of the local government share of the federation account to local government councils. It states that “the amount standing to the credit of local government councils in the federation account shall be allocated to the regional or state for the benefit of their local government councils on such terms and in such a manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly” and that “Each region shall maintain a special account to be called State Joint Local Government Account into which shall be paid all allocations to the local government councils of the state from the government of the state.” This constitutional provision is often times exploited by some state governments who wittingly stifle and impoverish local governance.

Political Interference: Political interference in local government affairs in Nigeria is rife. It is a common trend for political elite and state actors to influence and pressurize local government authorities in one way or the other especially during election cycles. Such interference range from withholding of statutory allocations, socioeconomic demands, political appointments and choice of juicy LG projects to staff employments and development, sponsoring of electoral positions and appointments at different levels. Dunsire [12] argues that: There is no region of the Federation of Nigeria where one form of illegality or the other is not committed with finance of third tier of government, through constant reduction of primary school teacher’s salary, sponsoring of elections, region/local government joint account project, no payment of pensioners, taking over the local government and handing them over to consultants and cronies and non-utilization of the training fund including arbitrary reduction of stipulated percentages for these purposes³. This makes it increasingly difficult if not impossible for LGs in Nigeria to function optimally, responsibly and accountably rather they have become conduit pipes for financial impropriety and corruption. Eboh E. Diejomaoh

[13] corroborates the assertion insisting that “It is a notorious fact that virtually all the local governments across all the states in Nigeria are run by caretakers appointed by the governors. These caretakers serve at the governors’ pleasure as they can be removed without reference to anyone”⁴. Stifling of LG accounts is a disaster of the highest order with high rate of recurrence, impunity and disservice to the people and nation.

Unskilled Labour: One of the inevitable consequences of poor funding of LGs is the inability of LG hierarchy to hire experts in critical sectors. Igbo Etiti like other LGs in Nigeria is inundated with multifarious problems. The activities of LGs that are supposed to be carried out by professionals such as the Town Planners, Engineers, Medical doctors, Statistician, Bureaucrats, Accountants and public administrators are subverted and Sublet to quacks and unwholesome practices. LGs labour force are filled with under-skilled, inexperienced and quacks. This act significantly reduces the gross domestic products of LGs nationwide and Igbo Etiti in particular.

Overstaffing and Redundancy: There is also the perennial incidence of ‘ghost workers’, that is, nominal employees without real physical presence or existence, a corrupt practice often organized and perpetrated within the accounts section of most Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA) in collaboration with stakeholders. Though the trend is significantly reducing with increased personnel audit, it is far from extermination. The implication is that in some places and establishments over the years, over 50% of staff salaries and emoluments are pocketed by corrupt public officers in collusion with some ‘invisible’ actors. This creates enormous pressure on the existent workforce minimizing competence level, efficiency and delivery. Additionally, LGs are perceived by strong corrupt political office holders as dumping and settlement grounds for uncertified political thugs and cronies in fulfillment of political promises or outright settlement after periodic election cycle and/or as the need arises. These classes of people rarely add any value to the system than leaching it to redundancy. The situation is more worrisome when these thugs are trade-offs of political promises and positioned as substantive heads of Bureaucracy or LG legislature. According to Ekpo [14] quoted in Hughes [15] it is not uncommon to find in some local government councils, such as chairmen, coordinators, councilors that are school dropouts. These calibers of people cannot articulate, formulate and develop programmes and policies that will change their

local government and citizens. This is common in most LGs across the country and unceasingly creates overarching consequence in LG interoperability.

Citizens’ Apathy: Citizens’ apathy even in the affairs of LGs is a big concern. It clogs the wheel of execution and development of critical projects, disrupts good initiatives and lampoons the outcomes of good policy framework. Ibok [16] argues that development is about citizens’ welfare and if it is to be meaningful, the people must not just be passive beneficiaries but its active agents and advocates. Many development projects in Igbo-Etiti local governments failed due to tactical exclusion of the local communities in the design and execution of such projects. As Kemi Busari [17] noted, “Any development programme or project, which marginalizes the contributions of the primary beneficiaries, could hardly make a serious impact on the lives of the citizen including lack of sustainability. This is because the local communities in Igbo-Etiti, which could have owned the programme and continued from where the government stopped, are from the levels of design, conception and implementation, excluded”. It is important to highlight that LGs are visible expressions of the collegial relationship between government and the citizens. People’s government at the grassroots level is the local government, as such; LGs should be intrinsically focused on citizen development, capacity building and advocacy. They should prioritize projects that directly and positively impact on the lives, interest and wellbeing of local communities. Community development is the baseline act of local governments and where there is communal alienation in the affairs and concerns of the LGs is huge concern because of its intergenerational consequences on public governance and administration of local peoples.

Prospects of Good governance in Igbo-Etiti LG Administration: The challenges of local government administration in Nigeria are multisectoral. Apart from affecting the expected overall capacity and productivity of governance of local peoples, it drastically impacts on the quality of live and livelihood of not only the workforce, the hierarchy of government and communities of local people but has far reaching consequences for intergenerational equity that suppose to reflect the economy of scale of such massive and bloated investments across 774 LGAs in Nigeria. It is thence necessary to review the possibility of new framework that could drive the prosperity of Local Government administration in Nigeria while mitigating noted challenges among others.

Provision of Adequate Fund: Funding is a capital need for rural development, community projects, capacity building and holistic revival of comatose local government bureaucratic models. Nothing works without it and everything is executed with it. It is the fundamentum relationis, the circus and the integer of many valences. The experience in Igbo Etiti LGA is a case of gross financial inadequacy to mete planned communal projects. Although the Federal government have taken a significant policy thrust in curbing state interference in the local government coffers, much need to be done to prevent not only policy reversal but tacit execution of the direct financing of LG councils across the nation. The new Guideline issued by the Nigerian Finance Intelligence Unit (NFIU) prevents state governments from making withdrawals from local governments' funds. Rather, it "Mandates financial institutions to distribute funds accruable to local governments among the local government councils of that state and not for other purposes." [18]. It further stated: "With effect from June 1, any bank that allows any transaction from any local government account without monies first reaching a particular local government account will be sanctioned 100 per cent, locally and internationally.... In addition, a provision is also made to the effect that there shall be no cash withdrawal from any local government account for a cumulative amount exceeding N500, 000 per day." [19]. The implication is that the Joint Account System between the State and Local Government Councils "Will only exist for the receipt of allocations but not disbursement,.... All financial transactions by local governments will be registered and monitored by the NFIU through e-payment module." [20]. The execution of the new Guidelines is expected to revamp the economy of Local Government Councils. It will reduce financial impropriety; curb state corruption and interference in Local Government affairs while freeing sufficient funds for community and human capital development across the nation.

Constitutional Reforms: The need to expeditiously and judiciously execute, consolidate and constitutionally defend existing reform is urgent. The reforms ought to be transformative, proactive and justiceable in all ramifications. It snowballs to system overhaul leading to the desired independent grassroots government and constitutional autonomy of Local Government system in Nigeria as envisaged, lettered and guaranteed in Section 7 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended. Such constitutional reform provides the needed capacity and capability for targeted growth of rural-urban capital development.

Strengthen the Anti-Corrupt Agencies: Given the pervasive and seemingly intractable nature of LG corruption profile, the fight against corrupt is extremely relevant and onerous. Corruption reaps off the gains of good governance and robs the future of the present. It is vital to rid local governance of institutional corrupt practices and save the posterity of our common wealth. Therefore, agencies of government – EFCC, NFIU, ICPC, Police, Central Bank of Nigeria, Judiciary inter alia vested with the power to detect, tract, penalize, sanitize and deter financial crimes and criminality including political and economic corruption are required to participate in the reordering, reforming and transforming the ordinance of Local Government administration in Nigeria to save our common future. There should be periodic monitoring and evaluation of financial transaction and illicit operations of Local governments because of the direct impact on the people and government. This should provide for the establishment of anti-corruption regimes in the barest Local government system since what affects LGs affects the people directly. It is critical to save, guard and revamp the local government system in Nigeria as a meaningful contribution to national development. This will indubitably free a lot of capital for integral community development, provide social, human and intellectual capital, infrastructure and deep sense of ownership and patriotism in government bureaucratic businesses across the country and beyond. Overall, it will significantly increase the quality of life at grassroots level which will no doubt affect positively the Quality of life index of Nigerians.

Integral Capacity Building for Local Government Councils: Local government councils offer inestimable prospects for holistic national growth. The deep and protracted rot in the system negated meaningful efforts and eroded the gains of governance. Therefore transforming the system requires intense, consistent, focused and strategic all-round capacity building. With well-planned, articulated practical programme modules which incorporate all levels of trainings, workshops, conferences, advocacy and multidimensional educational platforms for officers and communities, development will be rapid, protected, defended and holistic. It offers the desire opportunity to interpret, translate, transmit and acculturate democratization and citizen-centred policy programmes of regional governments fast and direct to the common people. Capacity building provides the platform to inculcate good work ethics, change attitudes and build sound political psychology for unity and community of interests for statecraft. It offers the people

and workforce the mental reality to critically assess and measure what government is doing for them and expects from them. This will invariably deepen the relationship between the government and local communities across the nation, boost the economy and sociology of inclusiveness than the current political apathy and exclusion inducing internecine conflicts and political conflagrations.

CONCLUSION

On the whole, the concerns of Local Government administration are huge and critical. While many of the issues are institutional, others are configured generically to serve and meet some ulterior motives perhaps of the whimsical creation in the first instance and forced overarching development problems cumulatively. The instance of Igbo Etiti local Government council is not exceptional. This brings to limelight the impact of rent-seeking moguls who constantly wrestle with the gains of local government fiscal projects, predetermine what is to be executed and truncated at what level of development, determine who brings what, takes and does what and with what. In fact, local government system in Nigeria is battered and snuffed, soon becoming a time bomb waiting to explode. Many of the council areas have been surreptitiously converted to dungeons, ghost towns and havens of criminality with serious consequences for posterity.

In the light of above, the study opines that the federal and state governments should quickly shore up greater responsibility and remarkable political will to timely rescue and revamp the entire local government system in Nigeria to avert imminent disaster. Efforts towards reform should begin with litigious undoing of the underdogs who for all times are inimical to sound reasoning and infinite value of nation building contracted and founded on the people and for their common good.

The entrenchment of constitutionality and the rule of law in the local government is proactive and popular. The study found out that one of the greatest obstacles to local government administration is the relegation and weak enforcement of the rule of law to guide and protect all affairs of the council even where the hallowed legislative chamber is domiciled with representative councilors as critical stakeholders.

Overall, funding remains the missing link to accelerated development of basic Nigerian communities. The study strongly advocates for greater autonomy and financial leverage to local government councils

nationwide. To ensure prudent and diligent management of public funds in the LGs, concerted efforts backed by strong political should be made to decongest, depopulate and rid Council areas and chambers of political predators, thugs and touts parading as public bureaucrats and whose impact on the people's socioeconomic livelihood is better imagine than experienced. Based on identified concerns and challenges impinging on the quality and outcome of LG administration, the study recommends (1) urgent overhaul and transformative reform of LG administration in Nigeria in the spirit and letter of Section 7 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended and the 1976 LG Reform to ensure expedience, prosperity, effectiveness and efficiency; (2) need to improve the overall national core welfare of rural-urban dwellers; (3) accelerate the delivery of social capital, intensify human capital development, ensure resolute maintenance of LG independence as enshrined in Section 7 of the 1999 constitution of the Nigeria as amended. (4) The monitoring and evaluation of LG interoperations is critical to ensure compliance to financial rules as key to rural development. (5) Tenure of LG council leadership and council members should be harmonized in a four-year non-renewable terms to ensure inclusive development and overall growth. On the strength of the above recommendations Igbo Etiti is designed to be the hub of development in critical sectors given the great potentials and capabilities of human capital widespread in its territorial heritage.

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