

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AS A VEHICLE FOR GRASSROOTS MOBILIZATION IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The primary focus for the creation of local government in Nigeria is to promote and enhance three major objectives namely; political participation, national development and national integration to the local citizens and the nation at large through proper grassroot mobilization in Nigeria. This is founded on the idea that democracy in Nigeria needs the active and strong participation of the majority of the population in order to be strong, viable, and sustained. The research therefore examined the challenges to the realization of the potentials of LG as vehicle for grassroot mobilization in Nigeria. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data gathering, interpretation, and analysis were used in the study. Oral interviews with key players and stakeholders were carried out, with additional data or information gotten from secondary sources were used in for the study. The findings of the study are that there are great challenges to the realization of the local government as vehicles for grassroot mobilization in Nigeria and this has had a debilitating effect on national development, national integration and political participation. In line with the findings made, the study recommended urgent

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actions for effective local government reforms in order to address the urgent and contemporary challenges identified in this study and strict adherence to constitutional provisions.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's grassroots mobilization at the local government level has matured, not so much as a result of its effectiveness and efficiency, but rather primarily due to its longevity and resilience in terms of its significance to the country's administration (Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2003). The vitality of local government grassroots mobilization arises from the need to promote equitable development everywhere in the world. Even while grassroots engagement has been crucial for local governments, there appear to be some limitations that have hampered its effectiveness over time. These difficulties include, among other things, the overt political meddling of the federal and state governments, the prevalence of corrupt dealings, misappropriation of funds and a severe lack of adequately skilled and qualified human resources (Akhakpe, Fatile & Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2012).

From the colonial era to the year 1975, Nigeria was unable to demonstrate the process of utilizing grassroots mobilization at the local government level that would have produced sustained development. The colonial masters concentrated on the cities and towns in order to assure the welfare of a limited privileged population who lived there. (Akhakpe, Fatile, & Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2012). Numerous Many settlements, provinces, and kingdoms had emerged their own distinctive designs and structures of political mobilization before the arrival of the British colonial administrators, which could cater to the requirements of the varied people at their various stages of development. Had the colonial government in Nigeria not intervened to stop the organic growth of the populace's distinctive method of political mobilization, perhaps more socioeconomic and political advancement would have occurred. The once influential and active tier of government is now seen as an outpost for the state and federal governments, respectively. This has led to a number of attempts and strategies being used since the local government reforms of 1976 to achieve effective grassroot mobilization at the local government level in Nigeria. As a result, the local government decrees that followed in 1989, 1990, and 1992 were designed to put into practice the local government's third-tier status in Nigeria and offer it a greater level of independence and an increase in its financial allotment. It is crucial to remember that irrespective of numerous reforms in the local government system of Nigeria, much progress has not been made in terms of the delivery of fundamental services in the local governments, which will convert to effective mobilization at the grassroots level. Typically, grassroots mobilization at the local government level includes implementing appropriate agricultural technology, establishing centers for skill

development, raising literacy rates, raising consciousness of rural opportunities, promoting political orientation and participation, disseminating knowledge of rural resources, sending out technical help, educating prospective donors and volunteers, and putting an emphasis on people's perceived needs and basic amenities. Unfortunately, local administrations in Nigeria operate in the opposite manner. Given that grassroots mobilization is critical in the development of local government at all stages, it is important to address the various obstacles standing in the way of local governments in Nigeria reaching their potential as platforms for grassroots mobilization.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Lack of qualified politicians, excessive local politics, corruption, a lack of community involvement in the development process, a misalignment of priorities, poor local government revenue bases, a shortage of highly skilled workers, a lack of autonomy, and other issues prevent most local governments from realizing their full potential as vehicles for grassroots mobilization in Nigeria. Given that lack of financial autonomy and corruption are the main issues, it should be noted that since the early 1990s, the sum of funding at local governments in Nigeria has greatly increased. Because local government funding is misappropriated by state governors and House of Assembly members, and distributed among political godfathers, there is a shortage of necessary funding. The media story dated Monday, December 26, 2011 described how state governors would improperly shift resources intended for local governments to nonexistent projects. Additionally, local government funding has been diverted from the federation account by state governors via the joint Account. The difficulties in realizing LG's potential as a tool for grassroots mobilization were made significantly worse by all these corrupt practices and issues. This paper therefore tends to address these problems which have posed serious adequate grassroots mobilization in Nigeria at local government level. Thus, in this study, fundamental ideas like local government, political participation, political integration and grassroots mobilization will be defined.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. Examine the challenges to the realization of the potentials of local government as vehicles for political participation in Nigeria.
2. Evaluate the challenges to the realization of the potentials of local government as vehicles for national integration in Nigeria.

2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Conceptual Review

2.1.1. Local Government

A fundamental commitment to grassroots democratic engagement in the political process underpins the idea of local government. This indicates that a higher level of government will legally and administratively delegate power, responsibilities, and resources to an area that has its own will and performs certain duties as part of the larger national structure. According to Agagu (1997), local government is the level of government designed to serve the local needs of the general public. According to Appadorai (1975), it is "government by the democratically elected officials engaged with constitutional tasks in issues involving the residents of a particular district or place." As the tier of government that is nearest to the people and "which is endowed with specific powers to exert control over the affairs of people in its domain" (Lawal, 2000:60), local government can also be referred to as that. According to Akpan (1982), sees the local government as "the

fragmentation of a nation into smaller units or localities for the purpose of administration in which the citizens of the various units or localities concerned play a direct and full role through their elected representatives who exercise power and undertake functions under the general supervision of the national or state government." A local government is intended to serve a role in advancing the democratic principles and managing local development initiatives of the society. It is also anticipated to act as fulcrum of socioeconomic development at the local level.

2.1.2 Local Government and Grassroot Mobilization

The local government remains the most effective structures to foster grassroots mobilization of the local people in the decision making. The local government is the government closest to the rural people. According to estimates, 80 percent of Nigeria's population lives in rural local governments. It is legitimate to assert that the so-called third world is a rural world, as some analysts do, and that any discussion of rural development that is meaningful must also discuss overall national development because it is at local levels that issues like unequal resource distribution, a pronounced lack of purchasing power, and grinding poverty are most acute. Therefore, in order to ensure the fulfillment of fundamental social demands, local responsibility and cooperation must be promoted. This can be done most effectively by encouraging local citizens to get involved in both their own community's issues as well as those of their local government. It is crucial to note that Nigeria's third tier of government should, at the least expectation, prevent the deterioration of living circumstances in the rural areas of this nation. In addition to being better equipped to halt the "growing wave of rural poverty," a competent local government will also be better positioned to inspire "local cooperation," making it easier to organize and mobilize the community.

2.1.3 Local Government as a Vehicle of Political Participation:

This has to do with the various official procedures and mechanisms that allow the people to participate in the formulation of public policy as well as the election of representatives to their government (Paki & Inokoba, 2008:157). Equivalent to this to this, Falada (2014:18) defined Political participation is the process through which an individual participates in the political sphere of their community and has the opportunity to help determine what the common goals of the community are and the best approach to achieve these goals. Direct or indirect participation is allowed in this voluntary activity. People can participate in politics in a variety of ways, such as through choosing or electing political leaders, forming policies, participating in community affairs, and other civic activities (Falade, 2014:18).

2.1.4 Local Government as a Vehicle of National Integration

On whether local governments in multiethnic states can advance political stability and national cohesiveness, scholars are divided. F.G. Carnell (1962), Several authors have argued in support of local government as a means of fostering or maintaining cohesion and stability in significantly divided governments, including Duchacek (1977) and Mazrui (1971). K. C. Coleman, the dean of local government [cf. Ojo, 1958:14], believes that federalism is a A suitable type of government to propose to communities or governments of diverse nationality that wish to establish an united administration and act as a single entity for a specific purpose but wish to maintain their independence, especially the desire to preserve their nationality in every aspect. Nevertheless, local government as a tool for integrating and fostering stability in multiethnic communities has fallen short due to the denial of the diversity in the continent, which Diamond [2009:387] estimates to number over a thousand. Politicians continue to mobilize and use ethnicity at the local level despite

widespread rejection of ethnic plurality. According to Diamiond [2009], the result of this situation was a schizophrenic political system where persons who denied ethnicity pursued the politics of ethnic balance. As a result, local governance in Nigeria and other developing nations has been susceptible to deterioration, instability, and dissolution. As evidenced by Nigeria's experience, these efforts have either progressed in one direction—toward unification and increased centralization—or in the opposite direction—against the former Yugoslavia and the defunct Soviet Union, to name just a couple. Scholars Elazar (1987), Bash (1997), and Ayoade (1988) are notable examples from this camp. Elazar (1987:169) asserts that unless there have been additional causes compelling integration, local government grass-roots mobilization has not proven to be a very effective technique for merging multiple societies. In a similar vein, Bash [1997] contends that there is a threshold at which a nation's diversity cannot coexist.

He believed that if the components of heterogeneity are especially potent or if they outweigh the elements of unity, local government efficiency in grassroots mobilization can be considered unattainable or impracticable. According to Ayoade [1998:5-6], other academics do not think that local governments may help multiethnic states achieve stability and national unity by acting as a platform for grassroots mobilization. According to him, it would be unreasonable to expect local government to create a seamless unity. Many people want things from local governments that they are not intended to provide. He continues, "Experience has shown that it has not proven to be a particularly good device for integrating plural societies into a single political system."

2.2. Theoretical Explanation:

David Easton's System Analysis serves as the theoretical foundation for this investigation. In this theory, David Easton suggests that the political system be used as the best analytical framework for political life. All systems have a few characteristics. A modification in one component might have a functional or dysfunctional impact on the performance of the other due to structural interdependence and interrelatedness. According to Easton (1953:129), the political system is made up of all interdependent components that help determine how values are authoritatively assigned to a community. According to his theory, political life may be understood by looking at each of its components separately. It is necessary to examine institutions like political parties, interest groups, the government, and voting. The nature and effects of political tactics like deceit and propaganda and brutality, as well as exposing the mechanisms within which these behaviors take place. A general understanding of what transpires in any self-contained political entity is achieved by merging the outcomes. There will be an understanding of how each element of the larger political environment relates to the others. Furthermore, according to Easton (1957), inputs come in many different forms and are what keep the political system functioning. The system transforms these inputs into outputs, and these outputs have an impact on the system and the environment in which it operates. He defines political life as all actions that have a major impact on the creation and application of laws that govern a society. Politics, according to Emino (2001), is the authorized distribution of values in society. According to him, what separates a political system in a given setting is the authoritative determination of values for a society. The political system is similar to a massive perpetual conversion process or conversion machine, taking inputs from the environment in which it is embedded in the form of demands and support, and producing outputs in the form of policies and choices, which in turn, influence the members' positive opinions of the system and the type of demands they subsequently make through the feedback process. The process of conversion progresses toward the authorities who, due to their position in all systems, have the specific obligation of turning these member requests into output. While support is the

ways in which individuals or groups have oriented themselves favorably towards the political system, typically through socialization and politicization to reduce the rate of apathy and indifference in the political system, demands refer to articulated contributions that are directed at the political system and which tend to propose for some kind of government attention on issues (Nekabiri 2000). It specifically refers to the behaviors that are an outward manifestation of solidarity with the norms, values or basic rules of the political system.

2.2.1 Empirical Review

Abiola-Oke, Aina & Abiose (2019) carried a study on Democratization of Disempowerment in Africa. Centre for African Social Sciences. To carry out this study, the researcher collected primary data through a questionnaire which was administered at some study area. The population for this study is the residents in Africa, from the population; a sample was drawn using convenient sampling. The researcher was able to distribute 1070 questionnaires, and retrieved 1007. The data was analysed using both descriptive and statistical analysis. The result of the finding from the analysis made shows that local government has great potentials in grassroot mobilization for both sustainable development in Nigeria. Wanshan, Qingyi & Gozgor (2020) conducted a study on Local Government and the Challenges of Community and Rural Development in Nigeria: The Way Forward. The researchers used ADF (Augmented Dickey-Fuller) and PP (Phillips-Perron) tests, causality tests, quantile regression, and fixed-effect panel models on data from 1995-2018. According to empirical findings, local government administration in the entire country faces an array of problems and difficulties, including interference by the federal and state governments with local governments' constitutionally mandated functions, issues with administration, arrangement and organization, issues with public perceptions and beliefs, and financial difficulties. Grassroots Leadership and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria: Periscoping the Impediments and Exploring the Imperative was the subject of research by Jiang and Wang in 2022. It does so by using the techniques of literature research investigation, information technology retrieval, and excavation. The index weight of the subsystem for rural revitalization in province A is computed using the entropy weight method. According to the findings, the outcome is that local government administration in Nigeria cannot effectively address issues, based on learnings from developed and emerging nations in the globalized world as regards the realization of the potentials of LG as vehicle for grassroot mobilization in Nigeria except the nation changes its existing administrative culture.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional survey design was used in the study. A cross-sectional study is a style of descriptive survey research that examines information on variables gathered at one particular moment across a sample population or a pre-specified subgroup. A cross-sectional survey research collects information from a sample population using interview tools, and then puts that information to qualitative analysis in order to make inferences. The application of an oral interview across three local governments in Enugu state made the use of a cross-sectional survey approach necessary in order to discover the respondents' perspectives. This aided in the search for solutions to the problems produced by the research questions regarding the study's topic and the obstacles to the potentials of local government as vehicles for grassroot mobilization in Nigeria. manifestation. The data used for the study were collected through two major sources, namely primary and

secondary sources. The primary data used were obtained through the use of oral interview instrument distributed to the 625 respondents selected from three local governments in Enugu state based on their sample size, using purposive sampling technique to select the sample size of each urban area. While the secondary data were sourced from textbooks, newspapers, seminar papers, journals and internet sources. The study was conducted in three local governments that make up Enugu state. The three local governments are the metropolises of Enugu state. The study was conducted with population of nine hundred and sixty-eight thousand three hundred (968,300) people of the three local government in Enugu state. The population was presented on table 3.1 based on the urban areas under study.

Table 3.1: Population Distribution

Enugu Urban LGA	Population
Enugu East	374,100
Enugu North	326,900
Enugu South	267,300
Total	968,300

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Nigeria Projected Population

Sample Size Determination

The researcher applied Yamane 1964 formula cited in Chukwuemeka (2019) to reduce the population to a researchable size as shown below.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

- Where n = Sample size
- N = Population size
- e = Error margin allowed (4% or 0.04)
- 1 = Constant

Therefore, the translation of the formula was done as shown below.

$$n = \frac{968,300}{1+968,300(0.04)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{968,300}{1+1549.28}$$

$$n = \frac{968,300}{1550.28}$$

$$n = 624.596847021 = 625 \text{ by approximation.}$$

The sample size for each urban area was determined in accordance with Sam Kumar’s proportional allocation formula. The formula is stated below.

$$S(A) = \frac{Nh(n)}{N}$$

- Where S(A) = Sample Allocated
- Nh = population of each stratum
- n = overall sample size
- N = overall population

Substituting our figures in the above formula gave us the table below.

Table 3.2: Sample Size Distribution

Enugu Urban LGA	Population	Sample Size
Enugu East	374,100	241
Enugu North	326,900	211
Enugu South	267,300	173
Total	968,300	625

Source: Survey Report, 2023

3.1 Method of Data Analysis

The statistical tools of frequency, percentage and table were applied in data presentation and analysis. This frequencies and percentages were used to present the research question that guided the study. The hypotheses posed for the study were tested using Chi-square (χ^2) statistics at 0.05 significant level and the calculated degree of freedom (DF).

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study identified the following challenges:

The study found that Nigeria's local government system faces a myriad of issues that tend to diminish its capability and ability to accomplish developmental objectives as well as goals. As a result, they have fallen short of meeting the local demands and needs effectively. The respondents have laid out a number of explanations why the local government system have performed poorly, with the following being the most important:

Lack of Qualified Politicians:

The respondents agreed that most of the time, the most competent candidates do not run for office in local government councils; as a result, unqualified people are elected as council members, supervisory council members, and council chairmen. School dropouts frequently serve as council members or chairman in various local government councils, as correctly noted by Ganduje (2008). These individuals are incapable of conceptualizing and formulating development plans and programs that will transform their local governments.

Next in line for the poor performance of local government is Corruption:

Many local government councils lack the resources necessary for development as a result of corruption. At the local government level, corruption takes the form of inflated contracts given to friends for projects that may not even be completed once the contractor receives a significant portion of the contract's value as a mobilization fee. The local administrations are also targets of corruption, which takes the shape of questionable expenditures including claims for duty tours, hospitality payments, and financial aid, among other things.

Furthermore, another challenge identified is Lack of Community Participation in the development Process:

Local governments get their sense of self-government or grassroots democracy through the involvement of the populace in decision-making and administration. The moment the grassroots are excluded from local government matters, they feel alienated and cease to support any development initiatives of such administration.

The study also found that Misplacement of Priorities is a significant challenge:

This is a result of the people's lack of participation in decisions that directly impact them. According to this premise, many development initiatives carried out by some local governments

do not take into account the fundamental requirements of the people they serve. This leads to either waste of funds or the people revolting in such project.

Poor Revenue Base of Local Governments is also a challenge:

Since the majority of the local governments are wholly dependent on federal funds to operate, the inconsistencies of the country's oil revenue have negatively impacted on their ability to deliver services to the general public. One important problem that has hindered the efforts of most local governments in grassroots mobilization is the absence of a reliable revenue base.

Among the challenges were the Dearth of Highly Skilled Manpower:

In Nigeria, the majority of local governments are understaffed. This emphasizes how important human resources are to the growth process. In most local governments across the nation, the majority of the staff members on hand are generalists, including administrative/executive officers, clerks, skilled artisans, office support staff (messengers), typists, and others.

Lastly, the study identifies Lack of Autonomy as one of the major challenges:

The state governments continuously reduce the authority of the local governments. Some local governments have been reduced to local administration or local branches of state administration as a result of the states' excessive control over them. They are not included in government priorities like the fundamental health program, significant agricultural programs, or housing programs, among others.

4.1 Summary of Findings

This research work examined the challenges to the realization of the potentials of local government as vehicles for grassroots mobilization in Nigeria. From data presentation and analysis of the study, the following findings were made:

Local government has failed to encourage involvement at the grassroots level. The main causes of this failure are the following: ineffective community participation in governance; a lack of qualified and competent office holders; apathy brought on by the public's loss of faith in politicians; the absence of credible local elections; a lack of adequate political education and awareness; the absence of feedback mechanisms; and the suzerainty of the state, to name a few. These difficulties have made it more difficult for the local government in Nigeria to fulfill its potential as vehicle for grassroots mobilization.

4.2 Conclusion

As a result of our findings, the study came to the conclusion that there is little political mobilization at the grassroots stage in Nigeria. Many, particularly the dispossessed and excluded grassroots population, now lack interest in the political process; as a result, they are not dedicated to the electoral process and other political obligations. This study showed that the political system and governance methods in Nigeria, particularly at the third tier of government, do not encourage thorough and effective participation in politics. The evaluation also identified a few barriers to effective political engagement in Nigeria.

Political indifference is a result of a variety of factors, including election fraud, money politics, violence, lack of trust in political leaders, a rapacious and self-serving political class, and, finally, an ineffective political system. Two further obstacles to effective mobilization of the people at the local government level are the lack of local autonomy and imposition of non-elected local government caretaker committees by the state governors to run the affairs of local government in Nigeria. We can therefore conclude that the widespread political indifference at the third tier of government has prevented the establishment and maintenance of democratic principles and practices at grassroots levels.

4.3 Recommendations

Based on the research findings and conclusion, suggestions are offered to increase the amount of grassroots involvement in local administration processes based on the research findings and conclusion. To promote grassroots involvement and leadership of local governance processes and structures, a persistent civil-based political awareness, training, and awakening initiative needs to be launched. To inform people of its significance and benefits of taking an active role in politics, formal and informal strategies should both be used. The local population should be encouraged to understand their political duties and responsibilities with the local government authorities in project design and execution through the implementation of concrete measures. This will ensure community ownership of projects, which is necessary for program sustainability as well as the growth and development of grassroots democracy. As a result of our research, we were able to determine that the state governors' control over the LG administration is the primary barrier to genuine grassroots democracy and growth. The Nigerian constitution must be amended immediately to give local government system in Nigeria the needed autonomy in order to tame the abuses and impunity of the governors and other higher authorities. It will be more challenging for state governors to arbitrarily dissolve elected local councils by state fiat for various political reasons as a result of the strengthening of local government rules. Actionable legal frameworks must be put in place that will free state election bodies from the influence of the governors and other higher authorities in order to address the undemocratic phenomenon of fraudulent, corrupt, and violent electoral processes. The civil society should be given more control in the hiring of staff and running of these state electoral bodies so that they can become truly impartial and independent. The establishment of democratic consolidation and grassroots governance in Nigeria depends on steps to make the electoral process more open, reputable, and free.

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