

**TRANSPARENCY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION  
IN NIGERIA: COMMUNITY BASED ASSOCIATIONS AS PANACEA**

**BY**

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**Abstract**

The failure of Local Governments in Nigeria in meeting the aspirations of the majority of Nigerians, who live in the rural areas and living below poverty line of US\$1 per day is traceable to the administration of the Local Governments in manners that are not transparent, hence huge sums of public funds have been wastage over the years. This paper posits that the constitutional empowerment of members of Community Based Associations in Local Government Administration in Nigeria will not only guarantee, but also ensure transparency, rural transformation and improvement in the living standard of the majority of Nigerians. The paper presents a Model of how CBAs can promote transparency in Local Government Administration in Nigeria and proffered recommendations.

*Introduction*

**“When one chooses a public life, he chooses not to have a private life.” -  
Hon Given Lubinda, MP - Zambia**

Community-Based Associations (CBAs) form the basis of the current thrust in development parlance in Nigeria, which places great emphasis on total mobilization of the available inputs within the community aimed at energizing their own internal momentum, and in the process meet the basic developmental problems confronting the communities. The merit in

Community Based Associations (CBAs) as a focal point of development is that they serve as a point of contact between the local government and the grassroots. Communities in Nigeria in the past have maintained a strong tradition in the area of self-help projects. Basic infrastructural facilities such as roads, bridges, markets, health institutions, primary and post-primary institutions have been provided in different parts of the country through self-help development programmes. For instance, the Community Based Associations through self-help initiative provided access road, electrification and market in Emuhi town in Esan West Local Government Council Area of Edo State. According to Okafor, Community-Based Associations have the capacity to respond to specific local development plans, mobilize their resources in a collective way, adjust their organizations to the required needs, and devise their own appropriate management rules to cope with the situation. Community-Based Associations (CBAs) come in different forms such as: age grades, guild system, town/village development committees, social clubs and women organizations, to mention only a few (Okafor, 1987:231-237).

Community Based Associations compared with other local organizations probably possess the strongest capabilities and promises for mobilizing and managing local resources. In the area of ensuring transparency and good governance, Community Based Associations have a vital role to play in acting as a liaison in local government administration. When given their proper place in Nigeria, they can be very effective in the area of collaboration or in partnership with the local government officials in their effort to bring transparency and good governance to the rural populace. It is in Community Based Associations that the most enduring communal spirit is built in Nigeria.

Local Government as a concept has been subjected to a plethora of definitions. In deed, it has been seen as an ancient institution with a new concept (Ola and Tonwe, 2003:1). According to a British scholar named Mackenzie (Mackenzie, 1964) and another called Whitaker, (Whitaker, 1970:77), it is difficult, if not impossible to find a universally acceptable theory of local government administration. This is so for the mere fact that the nature of the environment coupled with the specific cultures of a people determines the mode of organization they adopt in resolving their developmental needs. This has been one of the reasons why a definition or theory of local government administration that will satisfy all and sundry has been elusive.

However, in order to leave no doubt as to what local government is, it is imperative to give hereunder some perspectives offered over the years: The United Nations Office for Public Administration defines local government as:

*...a political sub-division of a nation  
or (in a federal system) state, which is  
constituted by law and has substantial*

*control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such an entity is elected, or otherwise locally selected (UNO, 1961)*

This definition seems to have been widely accepted as reasonably embracing. Both the Cambridge Conference on Local Government in Africa and the United Nations Conferences at The Hague on Administrative Aspects of Decentralization considered and adopted this definition. Hugh Whalen added a new dimension to the definition in order to ensure its acceptability when he adds that:

*...each unit of local government in any system is assumed to possess the following characteristics: a given territory and population, an institutional structure for legislative, executive and administrative purposes, a separate legal identity, a range of power and function authorized by delegation from the appropriate central or intermediate legislature, and lastly, within the ambit of such delegation, autonomy, subject always, at least in Anglo-American tradition, to the limitations of common law such as the test of reasonableness. (Whalen, 1970:312)*

Hill defines local government as:

*a system of territorial units with defined boundaries, a legal identity, and institutional structure, powers and duties laid down in general and special statutes and a degree of financial and other autonomy. (Hill, 1974)*

Furthermore, Imuetinyan simply defines local government as:

*a political authority usually at the community level which is created by law to provide services of local nature.*

(Imuetinyan, 2003:100)

Based on the above discussion, it is necessary to explore how transparency in local government obligations to the populace can be accomplished in fuller measure through the activities of Community Based Associations in Nigeria.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Since Nigeria attained political independence in 1960, various governments have enunciated efforts to develop the rural sector of the country. One reason for this act is that more than 70% of the entire population of the country lives in this sector. In terms of contribution, rural dwellers have rightfully asserted their place in the scheme of things. For instance, they provide the food needs of the urban population and also supply the raw materials for agro-based industries located in the semi-rural and the urban areas. Although, the rural populace remains the life-wire of the Nigerian economy, it has not attracted the needed attention from the government in terms of resource allocation.

Besides, there is very little evidence to suggest that past policies of government made significant impact in terms of accomplishing improved quality of life for these categories of Nigerians. Most rural areas in Nigeria lack good water supply, motor able roads and electricity. For example, according to UNICEF Report on The State of World's Children; only 39% of rural Nigerians have access to safe water. Besides, health-care facilities are poor and very inadequate in areas where they exist at all. According to the Fourth National Development Plan (Volume 1) about 95% of the entire population of rural areas in Nigeria is not covered by any form of modern medical facilities. Of course these problems need to be addressed in order to reduce the severity of the problem on the Nigerian rural people. (Fourth National Development Plan 1980-85).

The role of Nigerian rural population in national development cannot be over-emphasized. According to Jibowo, this segment of the population is important in a number of ways. They provide the bulk of the food, which is consumed nationwide and sometimes exported. They constitute the resource base of the nation and provide needed labour for industries and other service organizations located in the urban areas. (Jibowo, 1992:5) It is, therefore, imperative that this teeming segment of the Nigerian population be assisted in the discharge of these duties by investigating the factors which may have impeded their development over the years, and also identifying and strengthening local initiatives that can help reduce rural poverty and dependence.

Alila has proffered reasons for the lack of development of the rural areas in Nigeria. These reasons include: inadequate programmes design, poor management/implementation, corruption, lack of commitment by government and inadequate development support institutions for this segment of the society. However, beyond these reasons, the dismal failure of past regimes in Nigeria to tackle the problem of poverty and living conditions of the rural populace is traceable to the lack of transparency in Local Government administration, coupled with the inability of the government to explore the participatory approach to rural development. Much attention and thought seemed not to have been given to the fact that beyond government's efforts, the rural people themselves can meaningfully contribute to the development of their welfare. (Alila, 1998:69-84)

It is now evident that the task of developing the rural areas cannot be left to the government alone; rural people themselves must have a stake in their own development. This observation was also emphasized in an International Seminar on Review and Assessment of Rural Development Programme in Africa. It observes that:

*...unless there is full participation of the rural people in the whole process of rural development; there will not be any sustainable development. Participation should be coupled with democratization of the rural masses and transfer of powers to the grassroots level.* (Mensah, 1997:15-26).

Ihonvbere re-emphasized this point when he notes that:

*...development is not really possible if it is not participatory. External agents may facilitate this process, but they cannot even with the best of intentions consummate it. In the final analysis, a people develop itself through its own exertions.* (Ihonvbere, 1989)

There is great need, therefore, to pay attention to transparency in Local Government administration and the problem of improving the quality of

life of rural dwellers in Nigeria. This is more urgent in view of the declining situations they face especially in the areas of health, education, water supply, electricity, knowledge acquisition and economic empowerment in order to ensure transparency and good governance in local government administration. Local Governments as the third-tier of government in Nigeria are expected to be the grassroots developers and mobilizers of the rural populace in order to enhance rural transformation, but unfortunately, over the years, local governments in Nigeria have not lived up to their expectations, as they have become conduit pipes for the wastage of public funds.

Both the Local Governments and the Community Based Associations are institutions dedicated to the delivery of public goods and services. They both emphasize the transformation of the local communities. At some levels, both institutional arrangements converge in the discharge of their developmental roles, but on several lines each adopts more-or-less different operational strategies. For instance, a large proportion of Community Based Associations are almost self-reliant, self-managed and self-financed, but the Local Governments depend heavily on Statutory Allocations accruing to them from the Federation Account. Currently, all local governments in Nigeria are entitled to 20% of Federal Revenues and 10% of all Internally Generated Revenues of their respective State Governments in addition to their own Internally Generated Revenue. It is expected that local governments will be stronger financially than Community Based Associations. Community Based Associations have no statutory share of the federal revenues. They depend heavily on their self-finances in their delivery of public goods and services. Community Based Associations perform the *defacto* functions of the local governments by concentrating more on the provision of physical and social infrastructures, obviously because of the gross inadequacy (or non-existence) of such facilities.

It is against these considerations that the necessity for Local Governments to collaborate with Community Based Associations in the areas of transparency in resource reporting, resource utilization and accountability are indispensable in order to ensure good governance in our communities. Today, it is estimated that more than 70% of Nigerians live below poverty level, this further gives credence why the needed partnership between Community Based Associations and Local Government Council Officials cannot be over-emphasized.

### **Transparency**

Transparency is an ethical concept implying openness, honesty, candor and forthrightness in official dealings and relationships. It is the negation of corruption and unwholesome practices in the public service. Transparency International (TI), an international organization established in 1993 and which is globally recognized for combating corruption in the world recognizes that corruption is one major setback to development in most states of the world and that: ...it undermines democratic/good government,

fundamentally distorts public policy, leads to misallocation of resources, harms the public sector and private sector development, and particularly hurts the poor. (Transparency International, 1997)

According to Maipose, transparency is defined and explained as:

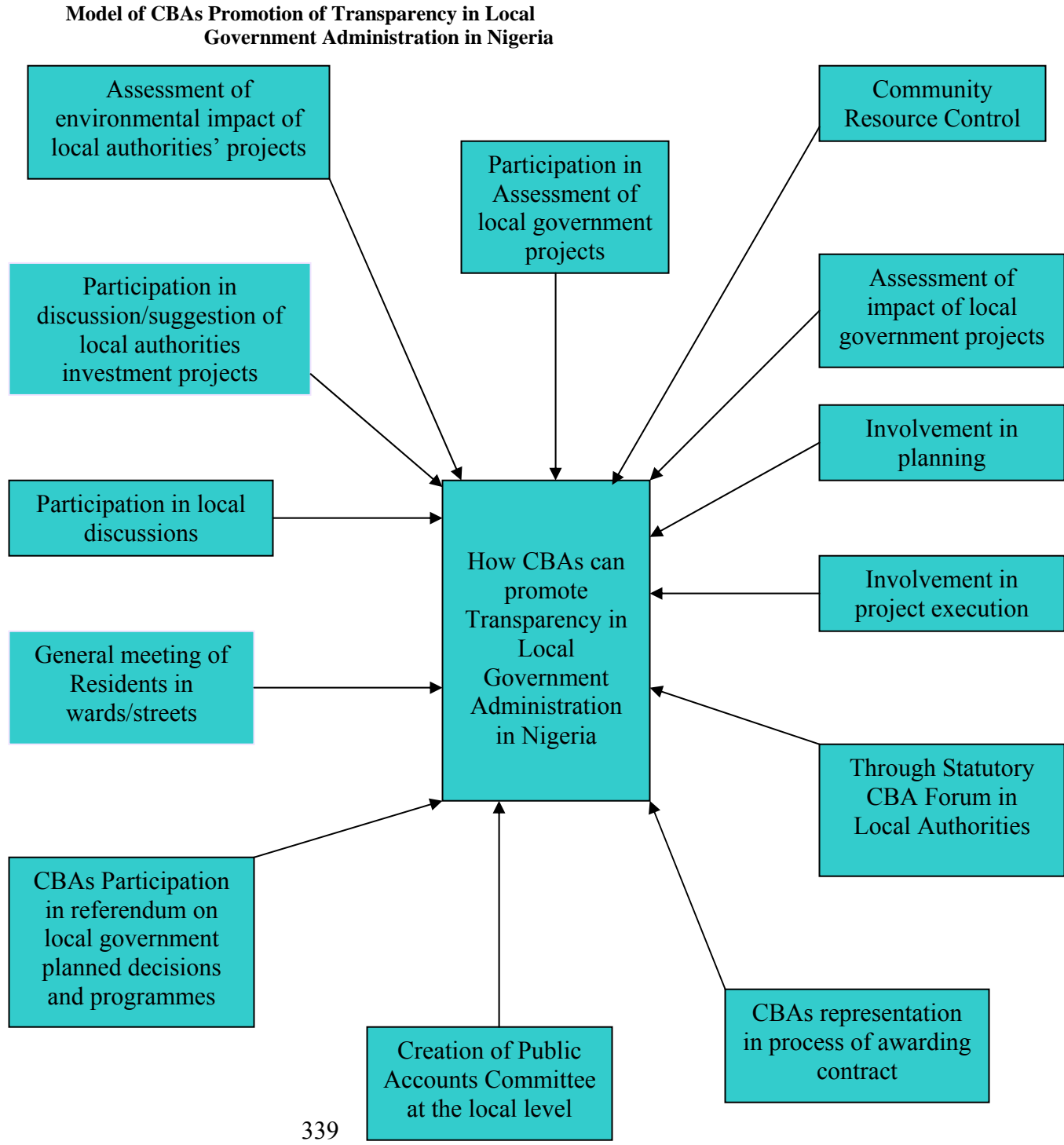
*....a characteristic of governance referring to the availability of information to the public on the transactions of the government and the openness of the decision-making process. Two interrelated issues are inherent in this phenomenon. One is the nature of information and the other is the use of that information... The virtue of a democratic form of government consists of the enabling of a search for, and a free flow of information so that appropriate choices, if desired, can be made. The general problem in many parts of Africa is that democracy is relatively a new phenomenon and civil societies have yet to be strengthened (Maipose, 2000:90)*

Transparency, thus, means that a person should lead by example in the conduct of his operations; and that in carrying out his official business, he must encourage broader participation and is willing to disseminate relevant information freely without sentiments or barriers. For Riley however, “transparency is...opening up previously secret public officialdom and generating freer public discussion through a free, questioning press and an active Civil Society can also reduce corruption” (Riley, 2000:142). The foregoing shows that transparency is a moral attribute of the mind that is necessary for the existence of a virile organization or government of which local government administration is integrally inclusive. The Local Government Councils in Nigeria are expected to govern the people at the grassroots and the citizen participation is required to be a *conditio sine qua non* for the success of the local government and its officials. The accomplishment of citizen participation requires a mutual trust, understanding and co-operation among the local government officials and the people. The people are organized into various Community Based Associations that serve as forum for the interactions of members of the different communities in the Local Government Council Areas. Community Based Associations are groups of individuals living in close proximity to each other and/or other social groups, grassroots entrepreneurs or associations able to identify a need and come together to access project funds for the realization of that need. The Local Government Council Officials ought to have been tapping or tap from the spirit de corp that exist among the people of the various communities as a way of bringing or enhancing the development of the rural areas and by extension the entire local government council areas. Unfortunately, this has not been the case since the establishment of the modern local government system in Nigeria.

#### How CBAs can Promote Transparency in Local Government Administration in Nigeria

Community Based Associations can promote transparency and rural development in local government administration in Nigeria, if they are constitutionally empowered to work in partnership with the local government officials to bring good governance to the rural populace. Therefore, the Federal and State Governments should adopt the following model to ensure transparency in Local Government administration:





**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are offered as ways of enhancing the relationship between the Local Government Officials and members of Community Based Associations in the various Council Areas in Nigeria.

- (1) Local Government Council Officials should always endeavour to inform members of Community Based Associations and the ordinary people of the total amount of financial resources allocated to it and generated by it in order to create mutual trust, respect and peaceful co-existence with the people that voted for them.
- (2) In the same vein, Local Government Council Officials should endeavour to let the Community Based Associations members and the people of their local government council areas know how their resources are being utilized in order to promote accountability, transparency and good governance.
- (3) The Local Government Council Chairmen should be made to be statutorily accountable to both the State House of Assembly and members of Community Based Associations through a CBA forum.
- (4) Community Based Associations should be constitutionally and statutorily established and empowered to work as a tier of the local government system in order to ensure transparency and good governance in local government administration.

**Conclusion**

The failure of Local Governments in Nigeria in meeting the aspirations of the majority of

Nigerians, who live in the rural areas and living below poverty line of US\$1 per day is traceable to the administration of the Local Governments in manners that are not transparent, hence huge sums of public funds have been wastage over the years.

Therefore, the constitutional empowerment of members of Community Based Associations in Local Government Administration in Nigeria will not only guarantee, but also ensure transparency, rural transformation and improvement in the living standard of the majority of Nigerians.

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