

## **POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **Challenges of Local Government Administration in Edo State of Nigeria**

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#### **Abstract**

This paper examined the fundamental problems that envelope local government administration in Edo State, and discovered that the challenges are constitutional issues. It also identified problems of graft, poor revenue generation by local authorities, and poor revenue allocation cum fiscal transfer to local governments. Besides, the paper identified erosion of fiscal autonomy and failure of local governments to be responsible for their inability to impact positively on the citizenry. Primarily, information was sourced through the interviews of purposively selected Local Government Officials of Edo State origin, while secondary information was collected through the instrumentality of official publications, records of political associations; relevant books, journals as well as Edo State Local Government Law (2000) and the Federal Republic of Nigeria Constitution of 1999. To stimulate harmonious Inter Governmental Relation (IGR), the Presidency should set up Advisory Commission on Inter governmental relations (ACIR) to be located at the Presidency with any arm of it in the State and Local Government levels, and there should be the complete re-orientation and self-purgation of the rank and file of Local Government functionaries in order to promote high degree of transparency, probity, responsiveness and accountability. Also, some degree of autonomy in operations and resources for local governments should be guaranteed. It is expedient to amend the 1999 constitution to remove the preposterous super-ordinate/subordinate pattern of relationship between state and Local Governments. We strongly feel that if the forgoing ugly situation is pragmatically arrested, local government administration will enhance meaningful national development in Nigeria

#### **Introduction**

Local Government Administration was not a phenomenon attendant upon the arrival of Colonialists on the Nigerian socio-political and economic scenes. In Nigeria, as in England and France, a form of Local administration preceded any form of central government. In the second half of the 20th century, the territory now known as Nigeria came gradually and half-hazardly.

It is pertinent to say that some parts of Nigeria experienced an advanced stage of human civilization and highly centralized government. The colonialists discovered that in most areas, the social, economic and political life of the people was already effectively, efficiently and elaborately organized. Kingdoms and empires such as the old Oyo kingdom, Benin Kingdom; Kanem Bornu and Fulani Empires, to

mention just a few, were relatively well-developed local government organizations. In the East, it was largely acephalous, yet these small groups catered successfully for the basic needs of their communities. These indigenous institutions owing nothing to European Political Concept were the foundation upon which local government in Nigeria has been built. The fact that the old nomenclature of native administration has been replaced by a more acceptable though hardly very clarifying term of local government does not mean that there was hitherto no local government in African territories, particularly in Nigeria.

The indirect rule system introduced by Lord Laggard (Gboyega, 1987:14) was based on the existing structure he and his colonial team met in Nigeria. In it, Lord Lugard made use of the traditional rulers to administer the Country. With the arrival of the colonialists, the form might be said to have been more organized, systematic, more efficient, effective and utilitarian but they have necessarily remained the same.

In this paper an attempt was made to examine the Challenges in local government administration of Edo State under various sub-headings. These Challenges are essentially constitutional.

Local government administration is enshrined in the Nigerian constitution thus:  
*The system of Local government by democratically elected Local government Councils is under this constitution guaranteed and accordingly, the Government of every state shall..... ensure their existence; under a law which provides for the establishments, structure, composition finance and functions of such councils (FGN Constitution. 1999:7)*

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the current political dispensation, local government is a caricature, corrupt and inept level of government that is insensitive and irresponsive to the plight of the indigenes, conceived to be nearer to the grassroots in physical existence, but farer in efficient and effective service delivery. A situation that makes it difficult for an objective assessor to say that the local government administration exhibits traits of good governance. The report of funding, Inter-Governmental Relations (IGR), autonomy as well as financial and administrative control, as provided for in the 1999 constitution and Edo State local government law, 2000 has not been quite encouraging. This paper, thus takes its departure from the inadequacies of governance at the local government level and the paucity of empirical data on specific constraints and failure of the Nigeria local government administration.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Local Government**

The concept of local government presupposes or implies a level of government, a sub-national unit at the rudimentary level. Constitutionally, it is a unit, which derives its powers and functions from a superintending government power. On the other hand, the superintending government is sovereign; hence, the power of Local

government is derived from the state Government and the state House of Assembly. There are as many definitions of local government as there are scholars, writers and public administrators. However, this paper will adopt a conceptualization that suits its nature. It is contained in the implementation guidelines for Local Government Reform 1976, which attempts a more functional and comprehensive explanation of local government. It states:

Government at local level exercised through representative councils, established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas..... that Local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized. (F.G.N. Reform. 1976:1-3)

### **Administration**

Viewing it from a general perspective, Augustus Adebayo defined administration as: .... the organization and direction of persons in order to accomplish a specific end... when two men co-operate, rudiments of administration have appeared. (Adebayo. A. 1984:1-10)

### **Challenges**

in this paper challenges refer to problems or impediments to functional, meaningful, efficient and effective local government administration in Edo State.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Human relations theory is an ample theoretical anchor of this paper, since the business of any government is essentially human interaction. Many factors are considered by philosophers to be influencing human relations in any organization. The environmental school typified by Montesquieu opines that the environment has tremendous influence on human relations e.g. the degree of hotness or coldness of work places could make workers in the local government to behave aggressively or at least unfriendly with their colleagues at work (Montesquieu, 1945:162). Some other factors could combine to make human relations strained-selfishness and aggressiveness of human nature, money, property and woman, especially when such things are scarce, thus competing and rivaling (Freud, 1945:163). For example, the unhealthy rivalry between local government functionaries over misappropriated council funds could lead to strained relations between them (Adedeji, 1986:126-135). In Edo state, the speaker of the state house of assembly lost his seat because of a persistent request on a council chairman to submit statement of income and expenditure, worse still, the former had to apologize to the latter before he could regain his seat. Cases abound in Edo state that inter-communal dispute over land, inter-personal disputes, over women and lucrative duty schedules have led to strained relations in some Local Government Authorities of the state. Intra-departmental struggles and rivalries manifest when the personnel department invades the jealously protected territories of other departments when it requires information or appears to superintend other departments in matters of employment, promotion, transfer, retrenchment and discipline.

Moreover, divide and rule or favoritism occasioned by undue influence of god-fathers and discrimination in the spheres of promotions, discipline, assignment of functions, training opportunities, are some of the remote causes of severed relations in local government administration in Edo State. Arguably, dichotomy in inherent powers and resources available to Edo state's local authorities have been making parity of treatment of workers difficult to put into practice.

## MAJOR CHALLENGES

### **Federalism, Intergovernmental Relations and the Logic of Local Government autonomy**

Federalism is a political arrangement in which there is a power sharing between the federal government and the sub-national units in such a way or manner that each is autonomous within its sphere of operations (Adamolekun and Ayo, 1989:157-176). It can take the form of aggregation in U.S.A and Canada, or disaggregation as in Nigeria and India.

The concept of intergovernmental relations (IGR), that is human interactions at various levels in government culminating into the sharing of power, functions and funds (Deil, 1978:19), appear to be the heart-throb of a federal system of government, the choice made by Nigeria over four decades ago. The practice, and not the choice, has however posed serious problems to both the government as well as the successive leaders in government in Nigeria over the years.

A cursory look at the evolution of the Nigerian Federal Administrative System over the years shows how the "loose" model of federalism, which Nigeria adopted in 1954 metamorphosed into one where the national government progressively became dominant in structure, organization and functioning since 1966. Justice Aguda asserted that the issue of federalism has been one of the most cantankerous issues not only in Nigeria but also in many states of the world today. Thus, Nigeria is one of the nations experiencing the vicissitudes of federalism. Although some scholars opined that there is no sacrosanct federal system and that there are as many federal systems all over the world as there are federal states. Akinyemi, like some other scholars, believes that each federal system is an off-shoot of its political environment. (Akinyemi, 1979: Preface). Notwithstanding, true federalism exists in United States of America, Switzerland, Australia, Canada and India just to mention a few. The levels of intergovernmental relations are more in a federal arrangement than in unitary state. Nine levels of intergovernmental relations are identifiable in a federation (Olugbemi, 1980: 114-116). They are:

- |        |         |   |                 |
|--------|---------|---|-----------------|
| (i)    | Federal | - | State Relations |
| (ii)   | Federal | - | Local relations |
| (iii)  | Federal | - | Civil Groups    |
| (iv)   | State   | - | State           |
| (v)    | State   | - | Local groups    |
| (vi)   | State   | - | civil           |
| (vii)  | Local   | - | Local Relations |
| (viii) | Local   | - | Civil groups    |
| (ix)   | Inter   | - | Civil groups    |

Out of the nine levels enumerated above, two are of particular relevance in this paper

- (i) Federal - Local Relations and
- (ii) State - Local Relations.

### Social Provisioning

Social provisioning is concerned with the provision of welfare service and the actual delivery of the services. It is undertaken by all the tiers of government from the federal, the state to the Local Government levels. The respective functions stipulated in the constitution guide the jurisdiction of each tier of government and the areas of overlapping functions. Such areas of overlapping functions are: health, Roads, Agriculture, poverty alleviation, Education and potable water.

Another significant dimension to the subject of social provisioning is social service delivery. It is notable that the mere provision of a social service is not tantamount to its actual delivery at the point of need. The experience most often is that the proposals for provision of social services may be approved on paper but the actual services may never be executed or delivered.

This constitutes the crisis of social provisioning in local government administration in Edo State. Local Authority Officials are only committed to self-gains and fictitious arrangements to siphon money out of the coffers of the government without caring about the plight of the general public. This is an attestation to the pervasive case of corruption in the Nigerian Local Government system.

A funny observation is that local government politicians only make vain promises during their electioneering campaigns. When actual elections are closed, they do embark on skeletal face-saving projects such as street lighting, grading of roads, construction of culverts, digging of gutters and construction of petty physical projects. Immediately after the election exercise and their swearing-in ceremony, they pay deaf ears to the common man and their people and busy themselves once again with the accumulation business. This same pattern of political attitude has been replicated among politician across eras and over the ages in the Nigerian political horizon.

<b>SCHEDULE A (Exclusive Responsibilities of LGS exceptional or temporary circumstances)</b>	<b>SCHEDULE B (Responsibilities which LGs may run Excerpt under concurrently with State Governments at the Initial phase of the Reform)</b>
a Market and Motor Parks	Basic Health Services (Health Centres, Dispensaries, Health Clinics, Ambulance & Preventive Health Services)
b Sanitary Inspection; Refuse & Night Soil Disposal	Nursery, Primary & Adult Education; Provision of Scholarships, Reading Rooms & Public Libraries
c Slaughter Houses & Slaughter	Agricultural Extension

Slabs	
d Public Conveniences	Rural & Semi-Urban water supply
e Burial Grounds	Fire services
f Registration of births, deaths & Marriage	Provision of Roads & Street, Lighting & Drainage
g Provision of Community & Local Recreation centres	Control of beggars, Prostitution & Repatriation of Destitutes
h Parks, Gardens & Public Open Spaces	Provision of homes for the Destitutes, The infirm & Orphans
i Licensing & Regulation of Bake Houses Liquor Sales, Bicycles, Hand Carts etc.	Provision of public Utilities
j Control of Advertisements in or near public places	Public Housing Programmes; Traffic Control & Parking
k Naming of Roads & numbering of plots & Buildings	Town & Country Planning; Building Development Control
l Collection of Property & other Rates, Community Tax, Vehicle Licences, Charges etc.	Piped Sewage Systems

Source:Dele Olowu (1981) *The Administration of Social Services in Nigeria: The Challenge to Local Governments*, Ile-Ife: Local government Training Programme, ity of

**Source:** (Dele Olowu. 1981:36). *The administration of social services in Nigeria: The challenge to Local Governments*. (Ile-Ife: Local Government Training Programme, University of Ife), p.36

The above table shows the wide array of functions and responsibilities of local government in provision and delivery of social services, but unfortunately, these services are not being performed as expected by the people in Edo State Local Government administration.

### Revenue Sharing and Project Execution.

The present fiscal relations have succeeded in increasing the states dominance of local governments. Relevant sections of the 1999 constitution provided for the state to remit 10% of its internally generated revenue to local governments within each state. At the last survey, only Lagos and Kano obliged, thus, the other states impoverish local governments through default. The pertinent questions are 10% of what? Who determined 10%? There was lack of adequate information on what formed the 10% because of lack of representation at the sharing table, and this situation created serious doubts in the minds of people at the grassroots.

Lack of resources or autonomy in resources is another case of concern. More than 80% of the revenue of most local governments in Edo State come from the federation accounts and the state joint Local Government Account (JAC) into which all allocations accruable to the councils are being paid. The state government 'Pinches' at will these funds under the guise of joint ventures.

Some observers have picked loopholes in the revenue sharing formula and the sharing exercise. For example the parameters of equality and population were said to pose obstacles to dynamic and effective instrument for socio-economic transformation. It has failed to induce revenue generation internally. Much of the allocations was not of material assistance but paper transaction, not actually transferred but credited to the local governments in the book and then spent by the state government for self reimbursement for execution of joint ventures on behalf of the local government. (F.G.N. ASCON. Report 1984:225)

More often than not, expenditures were incurred on frivolous and 'white elephant' projects by the state government through the House of Assembly directing the Council Chairmen to procure earth-moving equipments, ambulances, Volkswagen Bora for the Police Officers, Prado Jeeps as well as remitting millions of Naira to resuscitate moribund state institutions. All these instructions hamper development at the grassroots, and with the weak revenue base, local governments find it difficult to embark on capital-intensive projects capable of raising the standard of living of the downtrodden. Why? There is no substantial tax base reserved exclusively for exploitation by the councils; hence, no local government is self-financing up to 50%, while less than 5% could meet recurrent expenditure from IGR. The situation in the rural area is nothing to right home about, despite the over sixty sources provided for local government in the 1999 constitution (Oyeleye, 1996:208).

The same constitution allows local government to execute projects in accordance with budgetary provision approved by the legislature of the local authority, while the expenditure in excess of 2million per project is referred to the state government for approval; (Edo State Local Government Law. 2000:xii.92:37). This incapacitates the councils' efforts to adequately meet the needs of the people. Worse still, councils could not obtain loans to execute meaningful projects. Are we saying that projects like rural electrification, borehole, provision of blocks of classrooms, aphatic tarring etc. would cost below ₦2 million? No! Hence, for virtually all projects, the local government requires the state approval thus; the councils would not be able to execute meaningful projects. At the state level, there is Edo State Independence Electoral Commission (EDOSIEC) saddled with the responsibility of conducting elections into councils, the fate of candidates always hangs in the balance always

As far as judiciary is concerned, the constitution of 1999 stripes the local government administration of any type of court system – customary, sharia or magistrate – under its jurisdiction except in the provision of logistics such as buildings, furniture, stationary items et cetera for the day-to-day running of the courts. Out of the three arms of the council, only two viz: the executive and legislature are functioning.

For general Administration, it has been the Local Government service commission responsible for recruitment, promotion, posting and discipline of officers on GL 07-16 while the ministry of Local Government is there to further erode autonomy.

All these organs incapacitate the chairmen in effectively controlling senior staff of the council in Edo State.

### **Parasitic Relations**

It is one thing that the revenue accruing to local governments in Edo state is inadequate, it is another thing that even the meager amount at their disposal had not been judiciously spent on development projects essentially because of the ironical parasitic relationship existing between local governments and agencies of both Federal and State governments. Annually every government institution normally prepares budget – Federal, state and Local, Parastatals, Corporations, and various units. Unfortunately, local government funds are not realistically spent on projects of local councils, 'per se', but on various and strange projects or courses not necessarily initiated by local government but often introduced or compulsorily imposed by the Federal and state governments or through their agencies which usually go cap-in-hand for one obligation or the other. Among such strange programmes not budgeted for by local government but imposed were:

- (a) Funding of political party at State level through the payment of the obnoxious 5% of basic salary by all local governments political functionaries in Edo State to the State government.
- (b) Funding of the electoral organs of the federal and State government every time there was election in terms of provision of logistic solutions-vehicles and fuelling (INEC, EDOSIEC).
- (c) Funding of security arms of the federal government in terms of provision and maintenance of vehicles for the police force, the State Security Services, and the immigration office.
- (d) Continual financial demands by various agencies – the population Commission, Mass Mobilization organ called NOA.
- (e) Funding the judiciary without compensation.
- (f) Funding of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) Civil Defence Corps without consultation.
- (g) Funding of the purchase of dead caterpillars by the State Government for distribution to the Local Governments.
- (h) Funding of the purchase of cars by the State Government for distribution to the Local Government Chairmen as their official cars.

The spending, many times, became compulsory either to save local governments from avoidable embarrassment or to avoid crisis and civil disturbance. The summary of the situation is that local government cannot survive if the situation is not arrested.

### **Unhealthy Competition between Local and State Governments in Edo State**

Apart from the parasitic relationship discussed above, there is the cut-throat competition between the Edo State government and her local governments in areas of revenue generation, in particular, cases of such are common to the areas of establishment of motor parks, markets, collection of liquor license, regulated premises fees e.g. bake house and hotels, which constitutionally are among the exclusive functions of local governments. Federalism should not be mocked by



competition. It is often said that local government is not financially buoyant enough to execute certain projects, and so the State government embarked on them e.g. the construction of one General Hospital per council, nothing prevented all the local governments in Edo State from funding the project jointly as at that time instead of unsolicited ventures into which local government funds were diverted without profit to them.

### **Leadership and Conflict Management Challenges**

Local government administration in Nigeria has been groping for good leadership for a long time since independence. Common experience and literature on Local Government (LG) administration portrays the leadership of LGs as corrupt, selfish, weak and unfaithful.

The leadership provided at this level of government has not been very credible, path finding, innovative and honest. As a result of low level of democratization, Nigerian Local Government Chairmen are largely imposed on the people by the Governors and other party elites who also dictate to such Chairmen. This heightens fraud and other forms of corruption in Local Government administration in Nigeria. The consequence of these is that leaders at the local government level just like other tiers only specialize in making vain rhetorical promises, which are not usually matched with observable performance. It is as if telling lies is an inevitable quality of a political leader in Nigeria.

The problem of good leadership at the local government level has manifested in the inability of the political leaders to ensure good governance, peace and sustainable development in their various local government areas. Moreover, instead of witnessing harmonious relationship among themselves and the career officers, conflict and crisis seem to be the hallmark of their relationship. Conflicts that cripple local government administration include ethnic conflict, political conflict, elite conflict and factional conflict (Oladoyin, 2003:6-8).

The administrative conflicts in the local government always assume these three major forms, which are –

1. Conflicts between Political Office Holders and the Career Officers.
2. Conflict between the Chairman and the Vice Chairman.
3. Conflict between the Chairman and the Councilors.

There is no conflict without a cause. Usually, human interests vary and often overlap hence conflict centre on scarce resources, which thus results in struggles that ultimately lead to conflict situation. In recent time, most conflicts were fuelled by the economic factors. Other causes include land, cultural violation by another ethnic group, struggle over scarce resources, struggle over sitting of sensitive institutions in one community as against the others, struggle over competitive advantage within an organization, protest over annihilation and misrule and such other related cases. (Likert, 1999:218-219)

### **Conclusion / Policy Recommendations**

From the forgoing it is apparent that Nigeria has not objectively and effectively borrowed a leaf from advanced Countries e.g. the United States of America (USA) in handling the issues of intergovernmental Relations. Today America has permanent advisory commission on intergovernmental relations (ACIR) located at the Presidency. In addition, there are congressional sub-commission on IGR e.g. the General Accounting Office (GAO) that is responsible for monitoring federal funded projects in the States and local government areas. (Wright, 1978:19) Similarly, such institutions have been established in Canada, Australia and India, all with the hope of enhancing better intergovernmental relations. Both Military and Civilian governments have experimented for too long with local governments in Nigeria yet the degree of transparency, probity, responsiveness and accountability is still at lowest ebb. In order to allow local governments a break through, some degree of autonomy should be guaranteed. State government should stop 'killing' initiatives at the grassroots level. The attempt being made by the federal Government at establishing a unit of IGR should be objectively pursued and quickly too. In this perspective, the role of good leadership cannot be over emphasized.

In a country where democracy has been put asunder for years, there is much to be done to arrest the situation without further delay. However, there is solace in the fact that, like USA, which passes through nine overlapping phases of IGR, Nigeria too is hopefully passing through her stages of development. It is obvious that there is no true Local Government Autonomy without true democracy at all levels.

It is incontrovertible to assertion that local government councils in Nigeria have not significantly impacted on the lives of the entire citizenry. The Local Authority is, though, nearer to the people in physical presence, but very far away in efficient and effective service delivery. To this end, Local Authority Officials should cultivate high ethical standard, virtues, and be more responsive. There is the need to amend the 1999 constitution because most clauses, as earlier pointed out discourage harmonious I-G-R and autonomy of sub national units. With the current process, stability in the polity, high level of political and civic awareness amongst Nigerians, a well-disciplined political class as well as clear conception of public service and ethical standards in Nigerian, the need and prospect for greater Local government autonomy will surely increase. As things are now in 2007, the local authorities are appendages of the superintending Edo State Government while the situation is the same throughout Nigeria.

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