

RETROSPECTING THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN NIGERIA (1983 - 1993)

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ABSTRACT

This study, espoused on the structures of local administration in Nigeria as a government operating from the grass root from where government policy thrust must be focused. The study paraphrased the local administrative structures from the pre-colonial era across the post-colonial, early military and late military era as well as the Second Republic civilian regime respectively. However, a special focus of the study hinged on the 1983 - 1984 military administration and its reform processes. It was finally recommended among others that the major players must exhibit high sense of political will to work and to carry the people along in the scheme of things.

Keywords: Local government, grass root mobilization, democratic representation, colonialism, federalism

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as a nation state is bereft with the problem of heterogeneity in terms of peoples, race, linguistic differentials and even culture. This scenario points to the fact that each and every facet of the nation's political life cannot be completely divorced from the cradle of ethnic identifications. Hence, there is every need, right from the pre-colonial epoch to the present post-colonial Nigeria to rise up to the challenges of grassroots mobilization and development in order to better the life of the people. Thus local government administration seems to have taken its shape from a decentralized form of political arrangement, the others being the state and Federal government levels respectively.

This phenomenon seems to have attracted a lot of interest at the global scheme of things as it becomes pertinent to diversify government's day to day activities for efficiency and administrative effectiveness. This global interest in local governments as an agent of mass mobilization and development has also given rise to series of scholarly postulations. One striking aspect of this state of affairs is that every scholar of public administration seems to possess personal tone in respect to this subject matter of local administration in its conceptual point of view. Consequently, this study tows almost the same patternalized ways of thinking as the researcher intends to espouse categorically on local government administration between 1983 (Buhari Administration) and 1993 (Babangida regime) respectively. It is the utmost intent of this paper to boost further research findings with this menu at the end the day.

EVOLUTION OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

According to Orewa and Adewumi (1992) Local Government is defined as:

A system of local communities and towns which are organized to maintain law and order; provide some limited range of social services and co-operation of the inhabitants in joint

endeavours towards the improvement of their conditions of living...”.

It is interesting, for the purpose of this study to deduce from the aforementioned that local entities, by way of constitutional provisions provides the local communities with a formal organizational framework which is a moving force behind the smooth conduct of the affairs of grassroot as well as regulate the actions or inactions of members within that community. The evolution or the ecology of local government can be traced back to the pre-colonial Nigeria where traditional institutions were used in the indirect model of British administration considering the shortage of manpower, communication systems, language barrier, to mention but a few (Toluhi, 1986). Conversely, we can rightly say that aside from the pre-colonial era, the local government system in Nigeria spanned through several phrases across board.

Local government administration waded through both civilian and military regimes alike with various attendant modifications and alteration of nomenclatures and administrative styles, each of which attempts to create a border line with its predecessors putting its policy orientations and framework into consideration. Although, this depends on the character of the leadership in question at any moment in time. Thus, while most civilian/military administrations sought to project the entire shape, organogram and administrative integrity of local entities, others have seen no need to do so culminating into the recent bickering about scrapping of local entities for want of administrative efficiency (Gboyega, 2005).

ADMINISTRATIVE OFF-SHOOT OF NIGERIA'S POST-COLONIAL, EARLY AND LATE MILITARY ERA

It is interesting to note that the early post independence local administration in Nigeria was marked by a sense of far reaching administrative autonomy at the regional levels. However, there existed obvious differentials in terms of composition and

functions. Thus, the Northern Native administrative system characterized by feudalism was maintained as an inherent status quo from the colonial entities. Significantly, it can be argued that the incumbent Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) had its political base tied to the Northern oligarchy which is a product of imperialism. This was a plausible reason for the survival of grassroots politics at that level in the North (Gboyega, 1987).

Conversely, the local administration in the East was quite different in its outlook. In the Eastern region, both the District and the local council system were created in the rural areas. This was done to enhance the principles of representative government through elective processes. However, elected office holders were strictly kept in check by the party in power, thereby distorting the much expected autonomy of members of the country councils as it was the duty of both the Ministry for Local Government, the Local Service Board as well as the local government inspectorate offices to checkmate the powers of the country council.

Like the East, the western region was not different in terms of its operational dynamics. Thus, the Action Group (AG), a political party in control of affairs of government at that time, through its party surrogates, became fully involved in local government affairs. This was further enhanced by the creation of a three-tiered local council which was later short-lived by the 1962 crisis in the west leading to the declaration of state of emergency by the federal government of Nigeria (Nwatu, 1995).

Similarly, the early military era as at 1966 marked a turning point in the affairs of local government in Nigeria as a result of its policy formations. The local representation at this time was in the form of care-taker committee which was rather imposed on the people rather than asking for consensus candidates. Suffice it to say that the nature of the military regimes which was usually centralized and authoritarian affected the councils since the various regional governments made no pretence of allowing the councils

any trace of autonomy. Egurube (1991) wrote that the military junta was so dictatorial:

To the extent that local government actors, derive their legitimacy not from the people but from state governors during this period. The conclusion that these served more as watchdogs for their military bosses at the state level can hardly be faulted. Local government institutions were thus from all intents and purposes governed by predominantly instrumental and penetrative objectives (1991).

We may deduce from the aforementioned that neither the post-colonial nor the early military attempt at revamping the local authorities yielded any meaningful result. It is equally important to stress that the late military era, however, marked the watershed in its reformation process as it relates to local government affairs. Thus, the main policy thrust in the affairs of grassroots politics was the total reformation and standardization of local councils nationwide. Thus the reform objects of this regime types were, amongst others:

- 1) The tendency to enhance even development at local levels nationwide
- 2) The need to evolve programmes and policies responsive to the yearnings of the people and strictly manned by the same
- 3) To facilitate democratic values as well as enhance leadership potentials at the grassroots
- 4) To encourage resource mobilization through local participation and
- 5) To provide a reciprocal links of communication processes to and from the people to government.

Suffice it to mention that the reform process at this time assumes prominence than previous ones. Much more large and wide niche were carved out in terms of population explosion (basically, 150,000 to 800,000), and landmass demarcations (Egurube, 1991). It is equally logical to state that the reform process at this time was rather apparent to be real as the changes introduced

were not far-reaching as it should be. By and large, the local authority reform process was never to see the light of day as the country headed for the Second Republic. One may argue that the turn of events ushering in the civilian regime of Alhaji Shehu Shagari sounded a death knell on local government administration in Nigeria. Egurube (1991) argued that:

It is a seeming paradox that under authoritarian and military regimes, using between 1976 and 1979 as an example, attempts were made to democratize local government institutions whereas under supposedly non-authoritarian regimes, using the Second Republic as an example, rather than build on the heritage of democratic local institutions, these were destroyed (1991).

From the excerpts above, one may argue that the local authority system was rather overseen by the military in a good light than the civilianized regime system in Nigeria. Thus, local entities and their corporate existence was an irony considering high level political patronage, nepotism, indolence and all forms of corruption and maladministration respectively. Therefore, this tendency was capable of breeding tension between the local and state government with the latter having no constitutional regard for the former. We can rightly say that this period was a dark age for local authority as all genuine avenues for revival of the local administration was neglected, abused, politicized and marginalized in the scheme of things in Nigeria. Finally, the system now reached its anti-climax for total collapse as it was highly ineffective, unnoticed as it made meagre impact on the peoples as a whole.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN NIGERIA (1983 - 1993): A CURSORY APPROACH

Owing to the seizure of power by the Buhari/Idiagbon military coup de'etat of December 27, 1983, and later the emergence of Babangida military regime later in 1985, the local government system was to experience yet another reformation process. It

became clear that the military government under Babangida was not satisfied with state of local government at that period. Therefore, in order to improve on this parlous condition, the Dasuki panel was set up to overhaul the situation. The committee, among other things, recommended high level autonomy and funding in order to bring back its lost glory.

Besides, the Ministry of Local Government was scrapped nationwide while more powers and responsibilities were given to the local governments. Consequently, elections into the councils were conducted in December 1987 propelling the various council chairman and councilors into office through elections on strictly party bases. In any case, it must be borne in mind that the problems confronting the local government system was more or less operational arising directly from the behaviour and attitudes of the persons who operated the system. These operational problems hindered equitable distribution of amenities in the local government areas in no small ways (Political Bureau Report, 1987).

THE BABANGIDA'S REFORM AGENDA ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NIGERIA

The local government system during the erstwhile military regime of Ibrahim Babangida made a significant impact in the life of local administration in Nigeria. The military administration set up a 10-man committee to produce a national scheme of service for all cadres of local government employees. To enhance effective performance of the policy, the regime collated the Dasuki Committee, Political Bureau and National Service Scheme for local government employee for proper assessment. After due consideration, the committee came out with the following inferences capable of bringing a new face-lift and the local structures in Nigeria.

(1) The abolition of ministries of local government and the

- termination of state-local government joint account to forestall friction between the two tiers of government.
- (2) Increment of the existing local governments from 453 in 1988 to 500 in 1991, the reason of which is to forestall controversies surrounding ethnic politics already looming as well as accelerate local development efforts at the grassroots.
 - (3) Increment of local grants from ten percent to fifteen in 1988, and then to twenty percent in 1992.
 - (4) The release of National Scheme of Service for local government employees in 1988 which afforded the local council to promote its staff up to grade level fifteen. This created opportunities for the employment of professionals such as engineers, architects, legal officers, health offices etc.
 - (5) The ordersity to enable council chairman to appoint their own secretaries thereby making them legitimate holders of political authority in their domain.
 - (6) The stoppage of remission of annual local grants through the state government to avoid undue financial bottlenecks and
 - (7) The scrapping of Local Government Service Commission while issues of promotion, discipline and even development were directly referred to local authorities for execution.

A CURSORY APPROACH TO REGIME TYPES IN NIGERIA LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

At whatever level of analysis, it will be rather 'illogical to think that both the pre-colonial, post-colonial, early military as well as late military style of local administration was responsive to the yearnings and aspirations of the people. Bluntly put, one can unequivocally adduce that structures of government in virtually all levels were not responsive. Firstly, the colonial government

was rather dictatorial while arrogating all powers to it and leaving traditional entities as mere rubber stamp. Besides, these was express reluctance on the part of British authorities to expend their financial resources in Nigeria, though, a colossal sum of money was generated from the Nigerian soil. Again, as a way of continuous domination and extortion, taxation became a plausible avenue for financial pervasiveness while the economy of Nigeria was gruesomely articulated into the western style of monetization, the consequence of which is the perpetual widening gap between the rich and the poor to date.

On the other hand, upon change of mantle of leadership from the colonialists to our elites, things virtually remained the same. Thus, both military and civilian regimes alike have not faired any better. We can infer that apart from towing almost the same line of action by the First Republic, both second and third and even Fourth Republic have rather played the various policies of self-aggrandizement in the scheme of things. The Babangida regime which is our immediate constituency for assessment was found to have thinkered with the local administration in its reform process. Though his policies of introducing democratic space into local entities, and creating a supposedly local autonomy system etc, was rather predicated on his personal whims and idiosyncratic machinations.

The frequent stoppage of local government ministry at state levels and subsequent re-establishment of same at the federal level is a distortion of democratic values of the people. This trend is capable of jettisoning the much cherished democratic tenets of the people that his regime sought to protect. Besides, the tendency to appoint local government secretaries directly, among others, by council chairman was tantamount to creating unavoidable frustration and intimidations as it could breed high level political patronage at the level of appointment. This may not be too healthy for national survival in its entirety.

THE 2003 LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

For very obvious reasons, local government administration in Nigeria either at the level of colonialism, military dictatorship and the on-going Fourth Republic has largely remained the same in content and character. In comparative terms, however, it can be said that the reform in the Fourth Republic has attempted to give a new face-lift to the grassroot administration. Obikeze (2004) wrote that Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's national broadcast on the 18th of June, 2003 suffices. In view of the disturbing trend arising from the old order of arrangement, three core arrears of maladministration has been uncovered and there is every dire need to nip this trend in the bud.

To Mr. President, the non performance or gross under performance of local governments; the high cost of government and near prohibitive cost of electioneering campaign to individual political contestants as well as the atomization and continual fragmentation of local government councils including impractical division of towns into unworkable mini-local government(The Guardian,2003;This Day,2003; and Sunday Guardian,2003). Arising from the foregoing, it was a major bold attempt to foster the efficiency and effectiveness of the local government system for overall service delivery, good corporate governance and democratic survival in the Fourth Republic and beyond.

CRITIQUE

We may have to observe from the foregoing that both Obasanjo and Babangida's administrations carried with them very lofty ideas for the total overhaul of the already battered local government system. At the same time, the system lacks the necessary impetus to make it work effectively. In the first place, there was gross absence of induction course for training and enhancing the potentials of local administrators. In this way, the tendency to familiarize the council officials to their new tasks was

a serious set-back. Besides, the lack of financial bases to kick-start the autonomy rights was a total flop. Most local governments could not generate fairly above 5 - 10% from their internal sources.

The implication here amounts to total pressure on the lean resources emanating from the Federation Account in form of monthly subvention. As far as this was the only means of survival, then, the tendency to weather the storm became narrow when the resources were either cornered by the powers that be or delayed in the transition process down the trails of distribution chain. This is not healthy enough for local council survival in Nigeria at whether level of analysis.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above analysis, it becomes clear to state that the reform process of local administration is a two-way traffic. The process needs the contributions of the actors and the people to work in an articulated view. The major players must exhibit high sense of political will to work and to carry the people along in the scheme of things. On the other hand, the actors need support and inputs of the people to stabilize. Again, there can be an inbuilt mechanism to check corrupt tendencies in local councils in Nigeria to make the system a veritable one. The adoption of both vertical and horizontal approaches will help check indolence, nepotism, ineptitude, lukewarmness, grafts and all manner of crookedities inherent in local councils in Nigeria. This will serve as a boost to the already dilapidated local administration in Nigeria in the 21st century.

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