

CHALLENGES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA: A CASE OF THE OLD NNEWI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, 1979-2014

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Abstract

The modern form of local government as the third tier of Nigeria's political system had its uniformity in 1976. Since then, it has continued to exist and function with its executive and legislative arms of government at the grassroots level, to improve participatory democracy, service delivery, and sustainable development. However, in dispensing such roles attributed to it, local government had over the years been cut up with a lot of challenges, although the different local government reforms enunciated and further enshrined into the constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria for a smooth operations. This study will examine such challenges that affect the Nnewi Local Government Area which was one of the Local Government Areas created in 1976 and has further split into three local government areas, namely; Nnewi North Local Government Area, Nnewi South Local Government Area, and Ekwusigo Local Government Area, which are the focus area of this study. The study is presented in a thematic approach, with historical data presentation and analysis; it relies on information generated from both primary and secondary sources of data. The study finds that corruption, shortage of manpower, lack of political and financial autonomy of Nnewi Local Government in particular and other local governments in general need to be addressed urgently through local government reforms to enhance its effectiveness.

Keywords: Local government, Autonomy, Finance, corruption

Introduction

The early practice of integrated traditional local administration in Nigerian communities and kingdoms dates back to the pre-colonial era. It laid the foundations for the establishment of the modern form of local government administrative system in the colonial era. Local Government in Nigeria has gone through various evolutionary stages beginning with the indirect rule system and the Native Authority system which broadened its scope and included educated elements into the system. Thus, in 1950, 1952 and 1954, the British system of local government was introduced in the East with the Eastern Region Local Government Ordinance, in the West, and in the North respectively for efficient administrative purposes. Other remarkable local government reforms were made in 1976 which introduced uniformity into the system and in 1979 it was given a legal backing by being enshrined into the Nigerian constitution. All these were aimed at providing sustainable development, service delivery and bringing the dividends of government closer to the people at the grassroots. While the choice of 2014 as the terminal year of the study is based on the cancellation of the local government election conducted by Anambra State Independent Electoral Commission (ANSIEC) and the appointment of Mr. Emeka Ojukwu jnr. as the Sole Administrator in Nnewi North Local Government Area. In spite of the enormous local government reforms there has not been any discourse on the challenges facing the Nnewi Local Government Area, irrespective of it being one of the three hundred and one (301) Local Government Areas created in 1976 and its further split into three Local Government Areas in 1991 and 1996.

History of Nnewi Local Government Area

Modern Local Government system as the third-tier of government in Nigeria has evolved through the rudimentary stages during the colonial period to a consolidated system through the 1976 Local government reform. The 1976 local government reform was a landmark in the development of local government in Nigeria. The reform imposed uniformity on the structure and pattern of membership of local governments throughout the country. Prior to the 1976 local government reform, precisely after the independence year of 1960, local government was controlled on regional basis throughout the country. It was based on the regional basis that the East Central State of Nigeria Edict No. 18, 1971 created Nnewi Divisional Council which was made up of fourteen (14) communities, with headquarters at Nnewi. ¹ The fourteen communities include; Nnewi, Amichi, Azigbo, Unubi, Ekwulumili, Utuh, Akwa-Ihedi, Ebenator, Ezinifite, Osumenyi, Ukpor, Ozubulu, Ichi, Oraifite.

Consequently, in 1976, under the Anambra State Local Government Edict No. 9 of 1976 enacted by colonel John Atom Kpera, then military Governor of the State, which came into force on 1st September 1976, divided Anambra State into twenty three (23) Local Government Areas,² one of which was Nnewi Local Government Area, made up of the same fourteen (14) towns that were recognised by the East Central State of Nigeria Edict No. 18 of 1971. Hence, the twenty three (23) Local Government Areas in Anambra State were part of the first three hundred and one (301) Local Government Areas created in the history of Nigeria local government system.

In subsequent years, in an attempt to bring Local Government more closer to the people, to achieve adequate socio-economic and political developments, the Nnewi Local Government Area created in 1976 was further split into two Local Government Areas in 1991, namely: Nnewi North Local Government Area comprising of four communities (Nnewi, Ichi, Oraifite, Ozubulu) with headquarter located at Nnewi, and Nnewi South Local Government Area comprising of ten communities (Ukpor, Amichi, Azigbo, Utuh, Ebenator, Unubi, Ekwulumili, Akwa-Ihedi, Osumenyi, Ezinifite) with the headquarter at Ukpor. Furthermore in 1996, out of the Nnewi North and Ihiala Local Government Areas, Ekwusigo Local Government Area was created, having Ozubulu, Oraifite, Ichi (from the previous Nnewi North Local Government Area) and Ithemboji (from Ihiala Local Government Area), thereby leaving only Nnewi town in Nnewi North Local Government Area. Thus, this paper aims at discussing the challenges facing the Nnewi Local Government Area which currently comprises of the above listed three local government areas, and will also be referred to as the Old Nnewi Local Government Area in this discourse.

Challenges Facing the Old Nnewi Local Government Area

Local Government has long been recognised as a growth instrument for the development of the local communities. This is because, as the third tier of government, it is the nearest to the grassroots, and it is in the best position to know and address the problems of its residents. Regrettably, the realisation of the objectives behind its creation has been constrained by a number of problems confronting Local Government in Nigeria. Consequently, Nnewi Local Government Area has been visaged with numerous challenges which adversely affect their productivity and effectiveness. These problems as will be discussed below, include:- personnel problem, problem of corruption, loss of autonomy and financial constraints.

a. Personnel Problem:- One of the impediments to the effective performance of Local Government functions in Nnewi Area is the personnel problems. One of such problems is the politicisation of recruitment, selection and placement. According to C. O Orewa and J. B

Adewumi, recruitment practices based on patronage, have oriented problems of redundancy in Local Government where stern measures like termination of appointment and suspension of staff are rarely contemplated.³ This is because, as the Anambra State Local Government Service Commission is empowered by law to employ new staff from level 05 and above and transfer staff when necessary to various Local Government Areas in the State, while the Local Government executive body is empowered to employ junior staff, between grade levels 01-04 as well as casual workers, this opportunity is mostly used to favour relations of the participants, "sons of the soil", party stalwarts, friends and supporters of the Local Government officials. Furthermore, these recruitments made by most Chairmen, Caretaker Committee members and Sole Administrators are without due regards to the rules and regulations or in keeping with manpower requirements. Additionally, most of the employed Local Government staff preferred to work in urban areas than the rural areas, thus, resulting to lack of manpower in the rural Local Government Areas.⁴

For instance, according to the quarterly Newsletter of the Anambra State Local Government Service Commission, the staff strength of Nnewi North, Nnewi South and Ekwusigo Local Government Areas are 430, 237 and 343 members of staff as at September 2014 respectively.

Table 1: Staff Strength of Nnewi North, Nnewi South and Ekwusigo Local Government Areas as at September 2014

SN	Name	Code	Admin	Finance	Edu/Soc	Health	Agric	BPRS	Works	Total
1	Ekwusigo	ZBL	93	47	28	131	12	4	26	343
2.	Nnewi North	NNE	140	73	44	127	19	7	23	430
3	Nnewi south	UKP	74	35	17	77	14	6	14	237

Source: The Grassroots News: A quarterly Newsletter of Anambra State Local Government Service Commission Second Edition on September 2014, 29

However, according to Charles Ochei, the problem of personnel in Delta State is a case of over staffing as he presented figures of Aniocha North Local Government to be 634 members of Staff as at November, 2008.⁵

In addition, another important area of personnel problem in the local government is with regards to staff training and development. The importance of staff training and development cannot be over-emphasized as staff training and development are aimed at imparting the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudinal changes needed by employees for effective and optimum performance on their jobs.⁶ An effective training programmes can result to an increased production, reduced labour turnover and greater employee satisfaction. O.E. Ezeani avers that an effort was made to address the problem of manpower training and development in the local government system in Nigeria in 1979 by the Federal military government, when it introduced three university based departments of Public Administration: Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-ife.⁷ While currently, there exists the study of local government as a course in many tertiary institutions across Nigeria. In Anambra State, over fifty (50) local seminars and workshops are conducted annually while over twenty (20) out of State seminars and workshops were conducted in 2014.⁸

Also, the statistical record of Local Government workers approved for in-service training studies in various institutions in Nigeria from January 2014 to December, 2015 amount to about one hundred and ninty one (191) staff members.⁹ However, despite these trainings, Local

Government lack adequate, qualified, and experienced professionals, technicians and craftsmen who are much needed. There is need to improve the quality and quantity of staff in the Local Government Areas, so as to enable them provide worthwhile services to the local people. Professionals should be encouraged to work in Local Government Areas, so as to utilise their expertise in achieving the Local Government goals and objectives. Local Government staff should enjoy the same conditions of service with their counter parts in the civil service. To Mrs Stella Obiekwe and Mr Ilione Ifeanyi adequate manpower and professionals at the Local Government Councils increases the efficiency of Local Government in service delivery to the people in various development sectors of the Local Government Areas.¹⁰

2. Corruption:- Corruption has been noted as a universal phenomenon and major problem in Nigeria's political and economic discourse. Its prevalence in Nigeria, particularly at the leadership and administrative levels of the Federal, State and Local government has attracted both local and international attention. It is therefore, a significant factor leading to the perceived general failure of Local government to develop the rural areas, as well as an excuse, for the State government to dissolve the elected Local Government Councils.¹¹ This problem manifests in almost every Local Government Area in Nigeria. At this juncture, it is therefore important to conceptualize the operational meaning of the term "corruption". According to F. Waziri, the term 'corruption' comes from Greek word 'corruptus', meaning an aberration or misnomer.¹² While to the United Nations Global Programme Against Corruption (GPAC) and Transparency International (TI), the term 'corruption' means an abuse of entrusted power for personal gain.¹³ Similarly, V. Egwemi avers that any behaviour that deviates from the accepted norm, especially in the public office, that offers undue and unmerited advantage for personal, group or family gains through the betrayal of public trust is corruption.¹⁴ Also, to F.A. Olasupo, corruption is an illegal acquisition of wealth, giving and taking of bribe and personal use of public resources.¹⁵ Contradictory to the above definitions, N. Nwabueze views corruption from a social perspective, to mean- "a form of social deviance, in some case, a criminal deviance, the result of failure or lack of will to respect the norms of social interactions."¹⁶ This implies that any form of behaviour that deviates from generally accepted rules and norms with the intention of achieving personal and group gain is corruption. Furthermore, T. Lawal and O.K. victor classifies corruption into four categories, namely-moral corruption, economic corruption, political corruption and electoral corruption.¹⁷ Among these, political corruption is applicable to this treatise as it implies the use of powers of government derivable from the offices, (executive, legislative & judiciary) to misappropriate and embezzle public funds.

Including the federal and state levels of government, L.G is also found wanting in pervasive corruption practices. A. Ogbuene notes that Local Governments in Nigeria exist within the socio-economic and moral milieu of Nigeria where the preponderant attitude of Nigerians towards public office is that of personal aggrandizement, indiscriminate materialism, nepotism and decadence.¹⁸ Local Government as a product of the environment equally manifests traits akin to the above, as they are not devoid from the society. The high level of corruption in the Local Government makes it difficult for them to channel the available scarce resources towards developmental projects and programmes. In Nigeria, the interest of local government leaders primarily revolves around schemes they can derive immediate personal gains.

Corruption in Nnewi Local Government Area is made manifest in the areas of revenue declaration by collectors, the award of inflated and fictitious contracts, inflation of staff salary, fraudulent sale and use of government properties, outright embezzlement of local government

funds by the Chairmen, Councilors and other local government officials and may also include the payment of huge sums of money to political godfathers.

an audit report published by the News watch magazine of December 20, 1993 "Fortresses of Corruption," the audit report indicted Local Government of fraud and corruption, and as captioned by O.E. Ezeani, the following revelations were made:

- a. All the Chairmen of the twenty one Local Government Areas in a particular State were pronounced guilty of financial irresponsibility.
- b. The Local Government Councils had become fortresses of financial malpractices.
- c. These financial malpractices include: inability to produce payment vouchers for money paid, non-availability of revenue receipts, loss of public funds, irregularity in stores accounts, irregular payment and inflated contracts, non-retirement of imprest advances as well as non-refund of personal advances collected by some Local government on behalf of other agencies. Precisely, the following amount could not be accounted for, seven million naira for payment vouchers, one million naira was paid to contractors who never touched the work, nine million naira was outstanding as personal advances against local government officials, and five million naira was deducted under various headings such as PAYE, Trade Unions, but was never paid to the respective agencies.¹⁹

Similarly, the result of an investigation on local government in Nigeria, carried out by News watch magazine in the year 2001 revealed that no fewer than thirty-one local government chairmen from different parts of the country were either under investigation, impeached or on suspension due to allegations of corruption.²⁰ The overall effect of corrupt practices in Local Government is the inability of the Local Governments to embark on sustainable developmental projects at the grassroots. For this reason, the state government had continued to wade into local government by either dissolving the elected local government councils and appointing their political stooges as Care-taker committee or Transitional Committee Chairmen and Sole Administrators, or challenging the Local government autonomy all in the name of checks and balances. Thus, the illegal appropriation and use of Local Government Council finances by the State Government contravenes/contradicts the provisions of the 1999 constitution of the Federal of the Republic of Nigeria section 7 (1).²¹

3. Financial Problems:- The major problem confronting Local Government in Nigeria is inadequate finance, and its availability determines the effective performance of the assigned functions. Thus, adequate funding of the Local Government becomes critical and imperative. Although, the Local governments have several sources of income such as the statutory allocations from the Federation account, share from State generated revenue and their own internally generated revenue, they still lack funds to execute capital projects. It is also more difficult to generate more revenue by the Local Government in rural areas to sponsor the execution of projects.²²

The allocations by the Federal government is most times and in reasonable measure siphoned by the State government through the State-Local Government Joint Account into which allocations from the Federation account is paid. Secondly, the internally generated revenue by the Local government has been very low, due to Anambra State control of the major sources of revenue for the Local Governments such as housing rates, waste disposal rates, street naming and numbering rates and so on. It could also be as a result of non-remittance of the State generated Internal Generated Revenues (IGRs) to the Local Government Areas and the failure of the Local Governments to identify and explore new and reliable sources of revenue and partly to high incidence of tax-evasion and avoidance by the citizens.²³ Therefore, the great dependency of Local Government on statutory allocations is inadequate for meaningful

development at the local levels and the autonomy it seek is easily manipulated due to lack of funds. To this, the Local Government Year Book 1998 aptly stated that:

In the area of finance; Local Government has not demonstrated the desire for autonomy in that most of them depend on the federal government to survive. Apart from the fact that this source dictates the fluctuating fortunes of the Local Government; it is more regular and constitutes more than 90% of total revenue of most local official pronouncements have called upon local governments to improve their internally generated revenue without creating the enabling environment to make this possible.²⁴

Thus, the lack of capital funds in the local government constitutes a major drawback in the implementation and execution of regular services, major developmental projects and investment programmes as the available fund at the disposal of the Local Governments are nearly used up in recurrent expenditure and payment of salaries.

4. Lack of Autonomy:- An essential requirement for effective performance of Local government is autonomy, unfortunately, this is lacking in Nigeria's Local government system, as there are instances of excessive control by the State Government, and through the Ministry of Local Government, and also by the Federal Government. Thus, this issue has contributed to a lot of heated debate and political discourse on Nigeria's democratic system; it has further led to the argument against the practice of federalism in Nigeria's political system since its grassroots level lacks autonomy for its co-existence with other higher levels of government. Therefore, S.T Akindele avers that the lack of mutual co-existence between the three levels of government is as a weakness of inter-governmental relations in Nigeria's politics.²⁵ As the issue of Local Government autonomy has been a subject of controversy, there is need to define the term 'Autonomy' to be in line with the discourse. To K. Awotokun, autonomy in its political sense means the ability of a self-governing unit to regulate its internal activities without intervention from external bodies.²⁶ It could mean the ability of a government to determine its domestic and external activities without intervention from any other body.

While to B.O Nwabueze, autonomy under a Federal system of government in Nigeria:- Presupposes that each government enjoys a separate existence and independence from the control of the other governments. It is an autonomy which requires not just the legal and physical existence of an apparatus of government like a legislative assembly, governor, courts etc. but that each government must exist, not as an appendage of another government, but as autonomous entity on the sense of being able to exercise its own will in the conduct of its affairs free from direction of another government.²⁷

According, to Nwabueze, autonomy would only be meaningful where each level of government is not constitutionally bound to accept dictation or directive from another. In other words no level of government must arrogate to itself a superior status or power to control and regulate the official conduct of the other. Similarly, to Centre for Democratic studies (CDS), Local Government autonomy refers to:

... the relative discretion which Local government enjoy in regulating their own affairs. The extend to which local governments are free from the control of the State and Federal governments is in the management of the local affairs.²⁸

On the contrary, Local Government in Nigeria has continued to experience undue interference from both the Federal and State governments, especially from the later which employ different

antics to ensure the loyalty from the Local Government, thereby effectively reducing the Local Government's control at the grassroots level, despite its constitutional recognition as the third tier of government. The Nigeria's constitutional provision appears inadequate and unfavourable to the local government, thereby, creating the grounds for the States and Federal interference in Local government. Local Government in Nigeria's political system lacks both political and financial autonomy.

The constitution did not provide adequately for the political autonomy of the Local Government in Nigeria. There were no provisions made specifically in the constitution for the Local Government Councils to be elected solely through democratic elections, neither were there time limits for the specification of the tenure of the Local Government political office holders, nor for the Local Government Councils to derive their full existence directly from the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The resultant effects of these inadequacies gave State Governments the discretion to determine the nature, content and direction of Local government elections and political activities. The State Governments therefore decides when elections would be held, who wins in elections, when to dissolve elected council, and the alternative framework to administer the affairs of the Local Governments.²⁹ For instance, between 1984 and late 1987, local government councils were abolished and the administration of the affairs of the Local Governments were placed entirely on the Sole Administrators. Also in 1994, the elected Local Government Councils were disband by the military government of General Abacha and replaced with Caretaker Committees.³⁰ While on the issue of the tenure of office of the elected Local Government political heads, on 5th December 1998, Local Government elections were held and the elected officers did not assume office until May 1999. The electoral law under which the Local Government officials were elected (Basic Constitutional and Transitional Provisions Decree No. 36 of 1998) provides for tenure of three years. The Local Government officials later went to the Supreme Court for an increase of the tenure to four years but the judgement was ruled against them, stating that the National Assembly have no powers to increase or alter the tenure of elected officers of the Local Government.³¹ Thus, on the expiration of the three years of tenure in May 2002, state Governors appointed caretaker committees for all the Local Government councils until elections were conducted. Unfortunately, the elections did not take place as at when due because, INEC failed to update and make available the voters register for the SIEC to conduct the local government elections as empowered by the constitution.

Another area of confusion created by the 1999 constitution which affects the Local Government autonomy was on the provision that empowers the State Government to determine and create new Local Government Areas. Although this was not witnessed in Anambra State and Lagos State, between 2001-2003³² as provided by section 8 (13) and (6) of the 1999 constitution. This brought about the tussle for control of Local Government between the States and the Federal government. The refusal of the Federal government to recognise the newly created Local Government Areas by State Government led to its judgement at the Supreme Court which was favour of the Federal government.

Furthermore, the lack of financial autonomy by the Local Government subordinates them to the State through the provisions in section 162, paragraph 6, for the establishment and operation of State-Local Government Joint Account. This provision does not allow for the direct funding of the Local Government from the Federation account.³³ Also, the constitution empowers the State to scrutinizes and approve Local Government budgets, and expenditure through the State House of Assembly, States here exercise arbitrary and undue control over Local Government finance through the establishment of the State-Local Government Joint Account.³⁴ This

interference in the Local Government financial autonomy accounts for their ability to initiate and execute development programmes or projects. In addition, the constitution provides that the local government shall participate in the development of primary and non-formal education.³⁵ While during the Babangida's administration, the payment of primary school teacher's salaries was transferred to the Local Government. By implication, it means that instead of the Local Governments "participating" in the development and maintenance of the primary and non-formal education in its areas, it becomes the sole financier, with no supervisory power on the Local Government Education Authority, although it has the power to appoint the Chairman of the education board.³⁶

From the foregoing, it is evident that Local Governments exist at the mercies of the State Government and that the higher levels of government have much control and interference in the affair of the Local Government. This accounts for the reasons behind the appointment of Sole Administrators, Care-taker Committees Chairmen or Transitional Chairmen by respective Anambra State Governors in the Local Government Areas of the State. The State government has overtime, accused the Local Government political office holders of corruption, hence, their reason for its interference.

Conclusion

The study shows that Nnewi Local Government Area tried to meet up to the expectations and primary reasons behind its creation, but have been faced with a lot of challenges over the years, impeding it from recording the desired objectives, as there still exists rural communities in need of good access roads, pipe borne water, health care system and other basic infrastructural needs of the people; despite the existence and generation of revenue from a renowned market (Nkwo Nnewi) in the area. The drawbacks to achieving the desired goals in Nnewi Local Government Area is as a result of instability in tenure of office as people rarely exercise their political mandate to vote, rather appointed officials often chaired the Local Government Areas on the whims of their appointers. Also the random termination of local government appointees, in most cases, truncated any meaningful development. Nonetheless, some Chairmen initiated and executed some projects in core sectors like agriculture, education, health, commerce and industries, infrastructural development and public service. Finally, the excessive use of appointed Chairmen and termination of their appointments, resulting to short office tenure, as well as corruption and autonomy in critical areas of finance and political rights of the local government need to be addressed urgently, for proper grassroots representation and development as local government is gradually losing its place and relevance in current Nigerian political system.

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