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REPOSITIONING THE NIGERIAN ECONOMY FOR A BETTER STANDARD OF LIVING THROUGH GRASSROOTS GOVERNANCE

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Abstract
This paper looks at repositioning the Nigerian economy for a better standard of living through grassroots governance. The study centered on identifying the position of local government as a third tier of government in the present Nigerian economy and factors that affected the standard of living in Nigeria. The paper adopted a qualitative technique which involve the use of textbooks, journals, magazines, newspapers, government publications, NGO publications, internet materials and other documents. It reveals that grassroots government in the fourth republic has been in disarray due to the conflicts arisen from the constitution. The paper identifies the complexity, lapses, inadequacies, and confusion that exist in the constitution. The research recommends as follows; economic recovery through grassroots governance; the constitutional status of local government must be clearly spelt out, the issue of joint-state-local government account should be abolished and election rather than appointment should be the means of choosing leaders at the local level.
Keywords: Nigerian Economy, standard of Living, Grassroots Governance, Service Delivery

Introduction

Every responsive government is saddled with the responsibility of providing welfaristic structure for her citizenry so as to earn the trust and patriot of the citizens. This assertion is in line with the formation of government in which the rights of individuals (grassroots) are submitted in exchange for improved standard of living. The present economic quagmire is rooted in a shaft from the master objective for which government was formed. Hence, the grassroots is the foundation on which the structure of governance is anchored. Grassroots governance (local government) is a system of government established for effective service delivery and to bring governance nearer to the people, entrust political responsibility to where it is most crucial and beneficial, a legal entity established by law for the economic propulsion. However, grassroots governance though being a pivotal instrument for repositioning the Nigerian economy, cannot achieve that in isolation but in a cordial relationship with other tiers of government. Though, such relationships should not be misconstrued as powers to interfere in the internal dynamics of local government, the recognition of local government as a third tier of government and the right to determine its functions including the quality and level of services delivered to the grassroots. Furthermore, the level of recognition cum freedom given to this tier of government determines the involvement of the grassroots in the economic repositioning, if as a separate tier, it means the people will be involved in initiating the economic policies, if as an appendage of the higher tiers of government especially the state, it

means the people would not be part of economic decision cum policy making. On this note, it is glaring stating that its effectiveness is determined by the level of autonomy granted to it as an essential tool for repositioning the economy of Nigeria. Having said this, it has become necessary to bring to the fore, repositioning the Nigerian economy for a better standard of living through grassroots governance as the bases for this paper.

Extant literature

Local government service delivery: A nexus for economic recovery

The fundamental reasons for government's involvement in standard of living in any nation cannot be underestimated. Legally, local government are meant to provide an integrative and participatory governance with a proper representation at the grassroots. By doing so, improve the standard of living of the grassroots. This is made possible by ascertaining the locations for infrastructure, preserving the environment, and provision of services such as; primary schools, primary healthcare facilities, drinking water, recreational facilities, libraries, roads and other services which are essential to quality of life. According to Obadan (2008),"local government in Nigeria is a well-recognized third-tier of government. It is administration or government at the grassroots or local level. At this level, government is expected to be very close to the people, both in the villages, settlements and towns, and to impinge on the day-to-day life of the common man. Local government is expected to be actively involved in the overall national development objective of achieving a broad-based social and economic development and securing an optimum utilization of manpower". Local governments are strategically located to deliver on the functions spelt out for it for three main reasons:

· Proximity to the people;
· Greater responsiveness to the needs of the local populace; and
· Simplicity of operation in that local government organizations.

Constitutionally, local government is saddled with the responsibilities of providing services relating to maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds; homes for the destitute and markets; sewage and refuse disposal; roads, streets, street lighting, drains, other public facilities. They also engage in economic planning and development of the rural areas by transforming the rural communities from their primitive state or level to a more desirable state through effective economic planning and programs. Economic planning and development of rural areas entails a process of making the rural areas free of absolute poverty, wide-gap inequalities and high rate of unemployment, which should be better achieved when government at the grassroots is able to live to its responsibilities in terms of prompt and adequate provision of services (like provision of small scale jobs, empowerment programs and equity in the distribution of the services). In a similar vein, Ugwu in Agbani and Ugwuoke (2014) sees economic planning and development of rural areas as the articulation, provision and stimulation of economic activities, health and educational advancement facilities, and utilities for rural dwellers. Rural development according to Agbani and Ugwuoke (2014) is a proactive measure put in place to enhance the well-being of the local people. Rural development can only be achieved if local governments are effectively and efficiently carrying out their duties of service delivery. Local government is the only tier of government closer to the people in the rural area and if the government is efficient in delivering local content services as advocated for by the efficiency theory of local government, then development will not be far from the grassroots.

The purpose for establishment of local government especially in Nigeria stems from the need to facilitate socio-economic wellbeing of the grassroots and this necessitated the constitutional recognition of local government as a third tier of government. The recognition

entails ensuring effective, measurable and efficient service delivery to rural communities. Provision of housing, water, rural electricity, roads and transport, health facilities are also among the primary functions of local government. Local governments are also expected to be creative and innovative thereby bringing out local economic development through various initiatives. In achieving this, local government authorities are required to identify prone communities, develop a system of monitoring expenditures with respect to their projects and the impact of the allotted resources on the said project.

Outside essential role of viable political and administrative mechanism for the transformation of grassroots, they are also instrumental to training and breeding of the grassroots democracy, a fundamental agent in national development (Adeyemo, 1995; Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010). As organ for socio-economic wellbeing of the grassroots, local governments are meant to use both federal and state government allocations including their internally generated revenue to bring about improved standard of living in and among the people within their areas of jurisdiction. This can only be achievable via effective interactive system among all levels of government.

The ability of local governments to perform or discharge these primary responsibilities has been a subject of national discourse and as a result necessitate the issue of service delivery in Nigerian local government system. It is a compendium and holistic agreement among scholars that local governments in Nigeria are yet to meet up with a justified reason for its establishment vis a viz grassroots service delivery. This assertion is in line with the expression of Obasanjo (2003)

> *What we have witnessed is the abysmal failure of the local government system. It is on record that at no time in the history of the country has there been the current level of funding accruing to the local governments from the federation account, yet the hope for rapid and sustained development has been a mirage as successive councils have grossly under-performed in (their assigned responsibilities). Almost all the areas of their mandate…, yet the clamour for the creation of more LGAs has not abated (Obasanjo, 2003).*

His observation presents among others the incapacitated nature of local governments in producing exactly the original objectives for their establishment. For Ukiwo (2006), instead of local government "bringing government and development closer to the people, local governments have produced absentee local government chairmen who are only seen at council headquarters when the monthly 'Abuja Allocation' arrives and vamoose with their standby jeeps and mobile police escorts after superintending over the sharing of the local government's share of the national cake among the relevant stakeholders". In a similar vein, Agba (2006), opined that "provision of basic social services such as education and health, as well as maintenance of roads and public utilities within the jurisdictions of local government is both a myth and mirage". Aftermath of this failure or inability to provide the needed services by local governments led the citizens into loosing trust in government as an institution established to address the needs of the grassroots. According to a research conducted by Lewis and Alemika (2005), Nigerians are not contended with the performance of democracy especially at the grassroots thereby, leading to diminished in trust in public institutions such as local government. And this necessitate the essential requisite in determining the low performance of such institutions like local governments with respect to service delivery.

According to Angahar (2013), service delivery is considered as the "provision of social or republic goods that will promote socio-economic well-being of the citizens". Government is saddled with lots of social responsibilities which include among other; public utilities, security, economic development, projects, enforcement of law services at the local government

level or the grassroots. All these are instruments for improving the standard of living of the grassroots.

The 1999 constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria in the Fourth Schedule as amended has accounted for the statutory functions of local government which its actualization guaranteed effectively service delivery of this tier of government. Some of these functions include;

i. Establishment, maintenance and regulation of slaughter slabs, market, motor parks and public convenience
ii. Construction and maintenance of road, streets, street lightings, drains and other public highways, parks, gardens, open spaces or such public facilities as may be prescribe from time by the State House of Assembly.
iii. Provision and maintenance of public conveniences, sewage and refuse disposal.
iv. Assessment of privately owned houses or tenements for the purpose of levying such rates as may be prescribed by the House of Assembly of a state.
v. Provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education.
vi. Development of agriculture and natural resources other than the exploitation of minerals.
vii. Provision and maintenance of health services

From the foregoing, it is the sole and exclusive but mandatory responsibility of local governments to attend to the first three functions while the last three are shared functions; i.e. function which the local governments will perform in conjunction with the state governments. The essentiality and nitty-gritty of these functions are second to none hence it make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives. Most importantly, these functions requires huge financial resources and that necessitated the need for coordinate and cooperate fiscal relations among the three tiers of government with tendency of conflicts and struggles. A cordial and cooperate fiscal relations among the three tiers of government helps in facilitating easy flow of funds and effective service delivery among the three levels of government, particularly the local governments and at the same time expunge the chaos that would have existed in federalism.

Empirical Review

One general problem of social science concepts, is lack of universality in acceptance which local government is not an exception however, attempt must be made to demystify the concept for easy understanding and to illuminate the study. On this note, Awa (1981) quoted in Obi (2010), defined local government as "a political autonomy set up by a nation or state as a subordinate authority for the purpose of dispersing or decentralizing political power". The above, definition narrowed down the position of Wraith (1984) in Obikeze and Nwaodu (2010), which has it, that local government is the act of decentralizing power, which may take the form of concentration or devolution. Emezi (1964) also in Obikeze and Nwaodu (2010), sees local government as "A system of local administration under local communities that are organized to maintain law and order, provide some limited range of social amenities, and encourage cooperation and participation of inhabitants towards the improvement of their conditions of living, provides the community with formal organizational framework which enables them to conduct their affairs effectively for general good".

Frankly speaking, local government is a compendium of philosophical commitment to democratic participation in the governing process at the grassroots level. This refers to legal and administrative decentralization of authority, power and personnel by a higher tier of government to a community with a will of its own, performing specific functions as within the wider national framework. It implies that local government is a government at the grassroots

level of administration meant for meeting peculiar grassroots need of the people (Agagu, 1997). It is defined as "government by the popularly elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place" (Appadorai, 1975).

The quest to further demystify this essential tier of government brings among others one put forward by a prominent writer, who sees local government as a "political authority set up by a nation or state as subordinate authority for the purpose of dispersing or decentralizing political power" (Agi, 2002). This means that local government is more of decentralization than devolution. Contrary to the opinion of Akpan (2008), who in his idea viewed local government as a separate tier of government that enjoys some reasonable measures of autonomy, with elected representatives as officials especially in a democracy. We attach acceptance to this idea hence it went across all the tenets of devolution as put forward by Ezeani (2004). Ola (1984), assert a claimed that local government exist to bring about democracy and provide the local people the opportunity to participate politically in activities that revolve around them and that local government is equally established as a training ground to socialize the citizens politically. Corroborating with Emezi (1984), who in his assertion affirmed that local government is a system of local administration under local communities that are organized to maintain law and order, provide some limited range of social amenities and encourage co-operation and participation of inhabitants towards the improvement of their conditions of living and provides the community with formal organizational framework which enables them to conduct their affairs effectively for the general good. For Abada (2007), local government is not established merely to provide essential services, which is centered on maintenance system, but is judged by the development observed in the area that actually contribute to the satisfaction of the local citizens within the area. More acceptable, is a definition put forward by Nwofia (2010) who noted that local government is characterized by its "autonomy, legal identity, territory, population, localness, democratic representation, specificity of powers, and uniformity of structure". Adedeji (1969), added that the "success and the effectiveness of local government depend largely on the financial resources available to the individual local authorities, and the way these resources are utilized".

Epistemologically, local government involves a philosophical commitment to democratic participation in the governing process at the grassroots level. This implies legal and administrative decentralisation of authority, power and personnel by a higher level of government to a community with a will of its own, performing specific functions as within the wider national framework. A local government is a government at the grassroots level of administration "meant for meeting peculiar grassroots need of the people (Agagu, 1997). It is defined as "government by the popularly elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place (Appadorai, 1975). The United Nations office of public administration (1977), cited in Obi (2010), defined Local Government as "a political subdivision 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 purpose. The governing body of such an entity is elected or otherwise selected". Exact labour as in the above definition could resort to force labour which is unacceptable in the modern time. Secondly, the idea that the governing body of a local government can be locally selected, does not exist in a system of democracy hence, those selected will be accountable and loyal to the persons that selected them rather than the people (Ezeani, 2004).

According to the Guideline for a Reform of Local Government in Nigeria (1976), Local Government is "Government at the local level exercised through representative councils

established by law to exercise specific powers within defined area. These powers should give the councils substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and to ensure through active participation of the people and their traditional institutions that local initiatives and response to local needs are maximized". The definition captures the meaning and essence of local government such as representative councils, the establishment of the councils by law in other words; the councils owe their existence to the constitution which created some levels of autonomy to it as a third tier of government in Nigeria, allocates territories and jurisdictions to local government to exercise their powers, enables the councils to enjoy their staff and generate revenue, grants the council right to determine and implement projects on areas in other to complement the activities of both state and federal government.

Discussion

It is widely argued that for Nigerian economy to experience rapid growth, grass-root governance must provide a leeway towards poverty reduction, wealth creation, self-sufficiency, job opportunities, mass literacy etc across the federation. Undoubtedly, above underscores the importance of Local Government in repositioning Nigerian economy for a better standard little wonder Olukotun (2019) avers that local government is that public sector organizations which is at the lowest sub-national level of government, legally and constitutionally recognized and required to take on certain responsibilities at the community level. However, recent studies reveal that despite the post 1976 Reforms, which granted the local government status as a third tier in Nigeria, issues around recurring Local Government autonomy, Abuse of Joint State-Local Government Account to mention but a few still persist. Otu and Anam (2019) observed that absence of clear cut local government autonomy in Nigeria could impact negatively on grass root governance as it contravenes Section 7 of the 1999 constitution that allowed for Local Government to take comprehensive political and administrative initiatives of its localities.

Furthermore, Aliyu, Afolabi & Akinwande (2013) has decried the flagrant abuse of the Joint State-Local Government Account by the State Governors as another drawback in grassroot governance and called for the accelerated amendment of Nigerian constitution by the parliament in a bid to fast track economic growth and advancement at the grass-root.

Conclusion

The purpose for establishment of local government especially in Nigeria stems from the need to facilitate socio-economic wellbeing of the grassroots and this necessitated the constitutional recognition of local government as a third tier of government. This recognizes the right of Local Government to ensure the delivery of service for the locals that is effective, articulate and efficient. The primary function of the Local Government are not limited to creating an enabling environment that provides portable water, housing, local roads and quality transportation system, rural electricity and health Care Centers with ultra-modern facilities. It is also incumbent on Local Government to fashion out creative and innovative means through which local economy can be harnessed for revenue drive and wealth creation. To strategically achieve this, authorities within the Local Government should be discerning enough to set aside vulnerable communities, initiate a mechanism to closely supervise grassroots programs and the value of resources allocated on the said program. The Local Government should serve as an incubation ground for grassroots democracy, thereby institutionalizing leadership training and political participation for advancement future leaders.

To guarantee a social economic well-being of its locals, the local government is duty bound to utilize its internally generated revenue (IGR) via a coordinated tax administration, both federal and state allocations to engineer a sustainable transformation which will in turn impact positively on the living standard of the citizenry within their locality. Achieving these said purposes will enable to a large extent the economic recovery in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The essential of local government is to bring effective services and development nearer to the grassroots. To achieve this aim, this study recommends as follows;

Cordial relationship between local government and other tiers of government, giving local government a pride of place, without any form of interference and as such facilitate the developmental processes which it set to achieve. The state cum federal government should not misconstrue the said relationship as interference in the affairs of the third tier of government as that undermines service delivery. Thus, hands off and stop interfering in the affairs of local government especially as it concerns elections hence, the objectives of local government include political participation. The grassroots should be allowed to elect who represents them politically at the local level.

Finance: The state/local government joint account system should be abolished hence the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria recognizes local government as a third tier of government. It should be allowed to access its allocation direct from the federation account for effective financing of developmental projects at its locality.

Constitutional Amendment: It is imperative to call for amendment of the 1999 constitution to guarantee local government its freedom from the state kingship and facilitate the activities as mass mobilization agent and increase political participation, developmental projects and so on.

Eradication of state ministry for local government: The ministry of local government created by the state government should be abolished. As this will enable local government being capable in the performance of their duties and be free from domineering tendencies of the state government, thereby increase its efficiency in service delivery.

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