

Model for Roles and Involvement of Local Communities in Development Projects and Programmes of Local Government Authorities in Nigeria

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KEYWORDS Advocacy. Democratic Governance. Participatory Approach. Self-help

ABSTRACT This paper is of the view that successive governments in Nigeria for too long have neglected the rural/local communities. There is very little evidence to suggest that past policies of government made significant impact in terms of accomplishing improved quality of life for the over 70% of Nigerians that live in the rural communities. This study, therefore, advocated a model for roles and involvement of the local communities in projects/programmes design, execution, monitoring and evaluation. The study concludes that the adoption of this model will lead to good governance of Local Government Areas in Nigeria and by extension enhance the quality of life of Nigerians.

INTRODUCTION

The spirit of advancing the common good of the locality manifests in the involvement of the local community inhabitants in development projects and programmes. Involving the local communities' inhabitants should form the basis of the current thrust in development parlance in Nigeria which place great emphasis on total mobilization of the available inputs within the community aimed at energizing their own internal momentum, and in the process meet the basic developmental problems confronting the communities. The merit in involving the local communities' inhabitants as a focal point of good governance in local government administration is that they serve as a point of contact between the local government and the grassroots (Okafor 1982). Communities in Nigeria in the past have maintained a strong tradition in the area of self-help projects (Okafor 1984). Basic infrastructural facilities such as roads, bridges, markets, health institutions, primary and post-primary institutions have been provided in different parts of the country through self-help development programmes. According to Okafor, community have the capacity to respond to specific local development plans, mobilize their resources in a collective way, adjust their organizations to the required needs, and devise their own appropriate management rules to cope with the situation (Okafor 1984).

In the area of ensuring good governance, local communities have a vital role to play in acting

as a liaison in local government administration. When given their proper place in Nigeria, they can be very effective in the area of collaboration or in partnership with the Local Government Officials (LGOs) in their effort to bring good governance and community development to the rural populace.

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

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

...a political sub-division of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing

body of such an entity is elected, or otherwise locally selected. UNO Summer Conference on Local Government in Africa (1961).

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

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

In view of the foregoing, it is necessary to explore how local government obligations to the populace can be accomplished in fuller measure through the activities of local communities' inhabitants in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Rural dwellers have rightfully asserted their place in the scheme of things in Nigeria, as they have continued to provide the food needs of the urban population and also supply the raw materials for agro-based industries located in the semi-rural and the urban areas of the country. Although, the rural/local communities' inhabitants remain the life-wire of the Nigerian economy, it has not attracted the needed attention from the government in terms of resource allocation. There is very little evidence to suggest that past policies of government made significant impact in terms of accomplishing improved quality of life for these categories of Nigerians. Most rural areas in Nigeria lack good water supply, motorable roads and electricity (Omogbe 2005). For example, according to UNICEF Report on The State of World's Children, only 39% of rural Nigerians have access to safe water. Besides, health-care

facilities are poor and very inadequate in areas where they exist at all. According to the Fourth National Development Plan (Volume 1), about 95% of the entire population of rural areas in Nigeria is not covered by any form of modern medical facilities. Of course these problems need to be addressed in order to reduce the severity of the problem on the Nigerian rural people (Fourth National Development Plan 1980-85).

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

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

It is now evident that the task of good governance of the local/rural areas cannot be left to the government alone; rural people themselves must have a stake in their own development. This observation was also emphasized in an International Seminar on Review and Assessment of Local Governance in Africa. It observed that:

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

Ihonvbere re-emphasized this point when he notes that:

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

There is, therefore, great need to pay attention to the problem of improving the quality of life of local communities in Nigeria. This is more urgent in view of the declining situations they face, especially in the areas of health, education, water supply, electricity, knowledge acquisition and economic empowerment in order to ensure democratic governance in local government administration. Local governments as the third-tier of government are expected to be the grassroots developers and mobilizers of the local communities, but unfortunately, over the years, local governments in Nigeria have not lived up to their expectations, as they have become conduit pipes for the wastage of public funds. Local communities' inhabitants probably possess the strongest capabilities and promises for mobilizing and managing local resources. This is because they are organic units for the formation of self-managing organizations, which ensure collective and co-operative action in the execution of community development projects.

The roles and involvement of local communities in local government administration in Nigeria can never be over-emphasized. Today, it is estimated that more than 70% of Nigerians live below poverty level; this further gives credence to the need for partnership between local government officials (LGOs) and local communities' inhabitants. Therefore, an establishment of model of roles and involvement of the local communities in the good governance of local government administration in Nigeria becomes timely and germane since local communities' inhabitants will help to complement local government's efforts in enhancing the quality of life of the rural dwellers.

Conceptual Clarifications

For the purpose of this paper, the following words are clarified as used in this work:

Local Government refers to a system of governance at the grassroots level. It is the third-tier of governance in Nigerian federal system of government.

Role simply means the duty(ies) being performed or to be performed by inhabitants of local communities in order to bring development to their various communities.

Involvement in this study means the participation of local communities in their own affairs. In order words, the partnership between the Local Government Authorities (LGAs) and the Local Communities (LCs).

Local Community is the grassroots organization of society where majority of Nigerians live to perceive common needs and problems, as well as acquire a sense of identity and common set of objectives with their social relationships found within this area.

Development generally means the improvement of people's life styles through improved education, incomes, skills acquisition and employment.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Governments at all levels can only be relevant to the people if the people are positively affected by the policies and programmes of such government. Therefore, for government to be relevant to the people, it must assign roles and responsibilities to the people. The people must work in partnership or collaboration with the government. In this paper, it is our belief that when there is mutual collaboration between the local government authorities and local communities' inhabitants, the basic needs of the people will be adequately and properly articulated, developed and implemented to the benefit of the people.

The Basic Needs Theory can be interpreted, essentially in four ways as follows:

First, Basic Needs means the provision of people's minimum requirements for water, housing, clothing, food and sanitation. This obviously does not indicate the quality or quantity of food required nor what resources are needed for its realization. Second, Basic Needs may mean allowing people to define their own wants rather

than what is stated by experts or professional bodies, for example by earning enough money to buy what they see as vital services and goods. Third, those who oppose the buyer's rationality model argue, instead, for government intervention in education, water and sanitation, and guidance in consumption. Fourth, basic needs can also refer to the liberty of the people to express themselves through personal and group participation in planning and implementing projects (Streeten 1981). The basic needs theory stipulates what human needs are and emphasizes the ends, rather than the means of development. The emphasis is on development from the individual perspective and his or her mental, physical and social well-being, rather than looking at economic growth in terms of GNP (Iyoha 1999).

Therefore, to adopt the basic needs theory, the local government authorities (LGAs) in Nigeria are hereby advised to utilize the model for roles and involvement of local communities in the development of projects/programmes as diagrammatically presented in Figure.

In Nigeria, it is a truism that the gap between the local government officials and their local communities is immeasurable. The Local government officials are at one extreme and the people at the other. The reason for this gap is due to the well-known fact that the people do not elect the local government officials, and therefore, are not representing their local communities. Rather, they represent themselves and their political god-fathers who selected them into the political offices that they are holding.

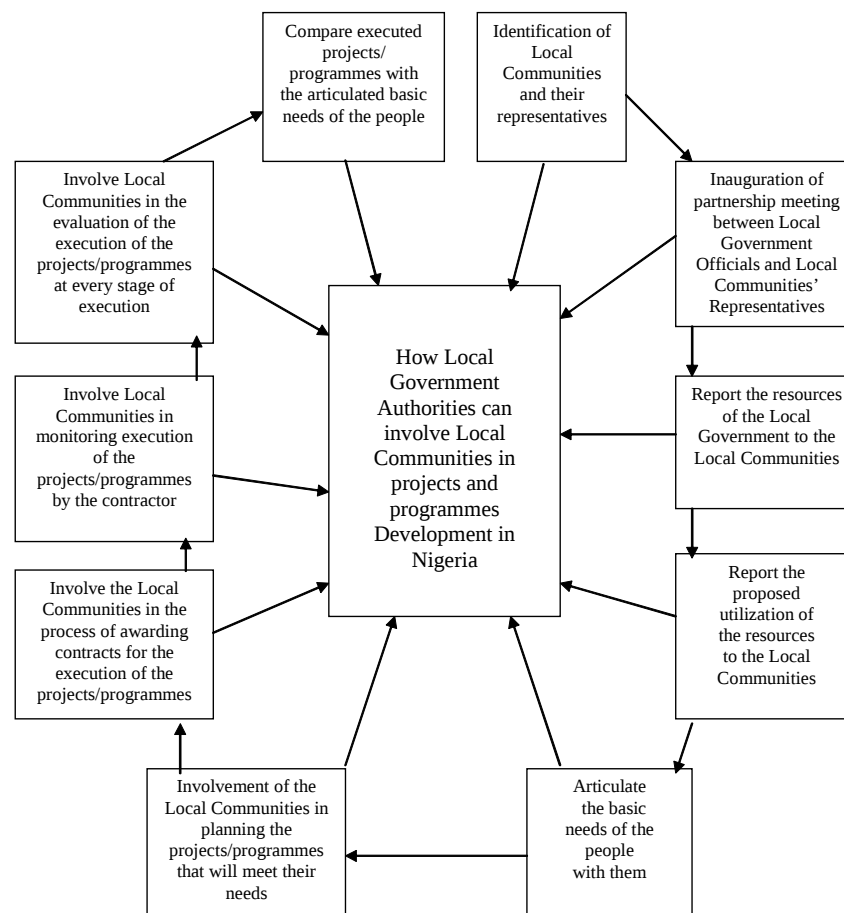


Fig.1. Model for roles and involvement of local communities in the development of projects and programmes of local government authorities in Nigeria

In a truly democratic society where governance is supported by the will of the majority, the local government authorities ought to adopt the participatory approach to development and this will include the assignment of roles, responsibilities and the involvement of the local communities in projects and programmes planning, implementation and evaluation.

Therefore, in view of the wide gap between the local government authorities and their local communities in Nigeria, this paper is advocating the adoption of a model for roles and involvement of local communities in development projects and programmes of local government authorities as diagrammatically presented above. The model is further explained as follows:

- (1) *Identification of Local Communities and their Representatives:* This involves the inventory of the various communities in the local government areas and their representatives for the purpose of partnering with them in order to bring development to the various communities in the areas;
- (2) *Inauguration of Partnership Meeting between Local Government Officials and Local Communities' Representatives:* After the identification of the various local communities and their representatives, it is imperative that there be a face-to-face interaction between the LGOs and Representatives of the local communities in order to create room for an enduring relationship and collaboration;
- (3) *Report the Resources of the Local Government Authority to the Various Local Communities:* It is germane that all the resources of the local government authority be made known to the local communities so that the expectations of the people will be limited to the resources available to the authority;
- (4) *Report the Proposed Utilization of the Resources to the Local Communities:* When the people are aware of how their resources are being expended and for what they are expended, there will be mutual trust and respect for the LGOs. The challenges of class inequality and class antagonism being presently experienced will be eliminated;
- (5) *Articulation of the Basic Needs of the People with them:* The basic needs theory posits that projects and programmes of government can be useful only if the projects and progra-

mmes are able to meet the needs of the beneficiaries. Therefore, the local communities must participate in the determination of their needs. For example, in Esan West Local Government Area of Edo State in Nigeria, the local authority constructed a market at Ujuoelen road end of the Benin/Auchi expressway without any consultation with the anticipated users of the facility. Because this facility did not meet the need of the people, the facility was rejected by the people, thereby wasting huge public fund;

- (6) *Involve the Local Communities in Planning Projects/Programmes that will Meet their Needs:* The local communities through their various representatives should be given the opportunity to work in collaboration with the LGOs to plan projects/programmes that will be meaningful to them in order to avoid the colossal wastage of public fund. For example, in Owan West Local Government Area of Edo State in Nigeria, the LGOs planned and executed a borehole water project for the people. The project was sited in front of the community cemetery without any consultation with the people. The people concluded that the water project was meant for the spirits that live in the cemetery, and therefore, decided not to fetch water from the borehole in order not to incur the anger of the spirits. So you can imagine the amount of money that was wastage on the project by the local government authority (LGA);
- (7) *Involve the Local Communities in the Process of Awarding Contracts for the Execution of Projects/Programmes:* The LGOs should as a matter of utmost importance include the representatives of the local communities in the process of awarding contracts for the execution of projects/programmes in the localities. Contracts should be as a matter of priority awarded to contractors who reside in the community (where possible) and the inhabitants of the community who are the target beneficiaries of the projects should be equipped with the details of the contract and contractor. This will have the following advantages: (1) The contractor cannot afford to perform below expectation, because he lives with the people, and also, he will be one of the beneficiaries of the project; (2) The people will know who the contractor is, and therefore, hold him res-

- possible for project failure and the people may even go to the extent of compelling him to perform by attacking him and his family;
- (3) The present level of class hatred and antagonism between the LGOs and the people will be eliminated. In this kind of situation, the LGOs will no longer need to go about with instruments of oppression of the people, as there will now be mutual understanding and peaceful relationship between them and the people;
- (8) *Involve the Local Communities in Monitoring the Execution of Projects by Contractors:* In Akoko-Edo Local Government Area of Edo State in Nigeria, a community elder informed our team that the LGA awarded contract for the construction of a pit toilet in one of the secondary schools in the area. According to him, he went to the site of the construction and discovered that the contractor was using quarter-rod for the construction of the slabs instead of one-inch-rod. He accosted the contractor who told him to get out of the site as he was not the one that gave him the contract. The contractor even added that he can afford to use any material he liked because he has paid his due to the LGOs accordingly. Discouraged by the reaction of the contractor and coupled with the fact that the LGOs may not listen to him, the community elder ended up with the following statement "well it is government business and what is my concern in it". The contractor completed the project unmonitored, and the LGA commissioned the same. On the day of commissioning, the Chairman informed the people that thousands of dollars were spent on the project and the audience applauded him for the achievement. Two weeks after commissioning, a female teacher in the school who incidentally was the daughter of the community elder earlier mentioned, went to ease herself in the pit toilet. After easing herself, she dressed up, moved her first step out of the toilet and as she moved her second step out, there was a BANG, the pit toilet collapsed and the young lady narrowly escaped death by an inch. From the foregoing, we can imagine the thousands of dollars that have been wasted on the project. We can also imagine lives that would have been lost if God had not intervened early enough. Consequently, LGOs should involve the local community inhabitants in the monitoring of all projects bearing in mind that the projects are constructed for the benefits of the people;
- (9) *Involve Local Communities in the Evaluation of Projects at every stage of Implementation/Execution:* The LGOs should always involve the local communities in the evaluation of their projects at every stage of implementation to ascertain the relative worth and compliance of the contractor with the project design, as this will eliminate the colossal wastage of public funds which is the hallmark of Local Government administration in Nigeria presently;
- (10) *Compare the Executed Projects/Programmes with the Articulated Basic Needs of the People:* Projects/programmes are geared towards meeting the needs of the target group. Therefore, the utility of executed projects/programmes should be compared with the basic needs of the people to ascertain their relative worth. This should be done by the LGOs in collaboration with the local communities' inhabitants/representatives who are the ultimate users of the projects.

CONCLUSION

Over the years, the psyche of Nigerians has been militarized due to the prolonged period of military rule. However, with the process of demilitarization starting in 1999, coupled with the commencement of the process of democratization of Nigeria's political system, it is hopeful that the rule of law will gain prominence in our national life. When this is achieved, the need to involve local communities in governance will become very imperative. This paper is of the view that successive governments in Nigeria for too long have neglected the rural/local communities. There is very little evidence to suggest that past policies of government made significant impact in terms of accomplishing improved quality of life for the over 70% of Nigerians that live in the rural communities. This study, therefore, advocated a model for roles and involvement of the local communities in projects/programmes design, execution, monitoring and evaluation. Therefore, it is my sincere recommendation that LGOs

should embrace the model advocated in this study in order to assign roles and involve the local communities in good governance of the local government areas of Nigeria and by extension enhance the quality of life of Nigerians.

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