

Review

A comparative analysis of local government administration in Britain and Nigeria: Lessons for Nigeria

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Accepted 27 June, 2016; Published 29 August, 2016

There are lots of differences in the structure, pattern, composition and efficiency between Local Government administration in Britain and Nigeria, despite the fact that Nigeria was colonized by the British and inherited her Local Government administrative structure. This paper examines these identifiable differences in Local Government administration in these countries. This paper undertakes a theoretical grinding of critical issues under study adopting a review of periodic publications, journals and related secondary materials as well as comparative analysis of these phenomenal issues. Certain issues were raised as basis for the differences in the efficiency of Local Government in Nigeria and Britain. Some of the lessons this paper identifies for Nigeria include sustainable local government reforms, clear cut constitutional delineated functions of Local government as well as adequate financing of Local Government in Nigeria.

Key words: Local government, Local government administration, Local government reform, Colonized, Autonomy, Constitutional.

INTRODUCTION

Local government is the closest tier of government to the people. In a unitary system, power is shared between the central government and the local government. In a Federal system, power is shared among federal, state and local governments. Generally, we talk of a central-local relationship. In a Federal system however, the relationship is largely between the state or regional government and local government because, constitutionally, local government are within the constitutional mandates of the state or regional governments. Basically, in any system, local governments are created to decongest the functions and burden of central governments and to provide services that are local in character.

CONCEPTUALIZING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

There is a need to explore what exactly is meant by „local government.“ It is difficult to find a single comprehensive conceptualization of local government that is acceptable to both the developing and developed countries of the world. A local government is a government at the grassroots level. According to Ojofeitimi (2000), the word “local” suggests that councils are meant for small communities and the word “government” means that they have certain attributes of government. Thus, he defined a local government as “... a political sub-division of a nation (or in a federal system, a state) which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including

the power to impose taxes or to demand labour for prescribed purposes.

The governing body of such an entity is elected or otherwise locally selected. Thus, an essential feature of local government is autonomy. This implies that although local governments are creations of the state or federal government, and therefore, are subject to state or federal government control in certain areas, nevertheless, they enjoy a reasonable degree of independence in administrative and financial affairs (Blair, 1977:13). For example, the local governments enjoy considerable autonomy in the preparation of annual estimates or budgets, the hiring, control and discipline of their own staff subject to a certain upper limit and the execution of certain projects.

Awolowo (1952) in Adeyeye (2003) referred to local government as "a system of government where local councils make, accept responsibility for, and implement their own decision subject only to such control as may be exercised by the people through their own regional government" (Adeyeye, 2003:30).

Adrain (1960), in the International Encyclopedic of the social science sub verbo "Local Policies" defines local government as: A political submission of a national or regional government which performs functions that are culturally defined as "Local" in character, which in nearly all cases receives its legal powers from the national or regional government but possesses some degree of discretion in the making of decisions and which normally has some taxing powers (Adrain, 1960:149).

The concept of local government, as observed by Dumadu (2008), involves a philosophical commitment to democratic participation in the governing process at the grassroots level. This implies legal and administrative decentralization of authority, power and personnel by a higher level of government to a community with a will of its own and performing specific functions as within the wider national framework.

Lawal (2000) also defined the local government as that tier of government closest to the people that is vested with certain powers to exercise control over the affairs of the people in its domain.

Agbakoba and Ogbonna (2004) define the local government from a legal perspective. They see it as a political administrative unit that is empowered by law to administer a specific locality.

The local government is the lowest in the governmental hierarchy within the concept of federalism. It exists within a defined territory. Local government is a political sub-division of a nation or state and it exists within a

geographical and political territory which has well defined boundaries (Ozor, 2003:18).

Usman (2010) in Onuigbo and Eme, (2015) sees the local government as a system of public administration at a local level, charged with the responsibility of bringing the people at the grassroots closer to the government. He, however, regrets that a critical survey of local governments in Nigeria today shows that they live in the shadow of the federal government, that a situation has resulted in the abysmal failure of the system. Local government is also considered as a government at the grassroots level of administration meant for meeting peculiar grassroots needs of the people.

Appadorai (1975) defines it as a government by the popular elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place. On his part, Emezi (1984) perceives the 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. It provides the community with a formal organizational framework that enables them to conduct their affairs effectively for the general good.

Ugoh and Ukpere (2009) observed that the following points are certain about local governments. First, a local government is a level of government with assigned legislative and executive powers to make and execute policies covering a particular local government area. Second, the constitution provides for its establishment, defines its structures, functions, power and sources of revenue. Third, the relationship between the local government and the central or state government is clearly stated in the constitution. Fourth, in a federal state like Nigeria, the local government is constitutionally recognized as the third tier of government unlike in a unitary state like Britain.

The United Nations Article of Declaration (1948) defines local government as 'a political sub-division of a nation (or in a federal system, or state) which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the power to impose taxes or to exert labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such an entity is elected or otherwise locally selected'.

Roles of Local Government

The roles of local government are in some ways similar to

those of the central government. The central government exists to provide for development services to the people and provide security for the citizenry and ensures participation of the citizens in government.

To some extent, local government performs such roles even though with some varying degree of intensity. For easier understanding, such roles could be classified into two viz: political and socio-economic roles.

Political Role

Local governments are veritable and appropriate institutions for promoting democracy at the local level. They are well-placed to mobilise the people politically through political education, political enlightenment and political actions. Local government has become very useful tool for the conduct of election at all levels of government. With such, the process of political recruitment is institutionalised and the institution can then help to train people for higher responsibilities.

Socio-Economic Role

The exercise of democracy and human rights can only be meaningful if demands and policies can be translated into physical development, including the provision of basic socio-economic services. Services of local government are primary or basic in nature as reflected in their functions. Some of these are basic health, basic education, agriculture and revenue raising and regulatory functions. People expect such services to be delivered to make any meaning of democracy and bureaucracy at the local government. Whether it is a municipal council or a rural council, the complexity may depend on the level of urbanisation or the availability of funds.

In providing socio-economic services, local governments have to work with community groups and the citizenry to harness community energies and input into development. A greater part of the developmental initiatives and effectiveness in local government is a function of community development or self help groups

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

Democratic Participatory School

The influence on this school has largely been the work of

John Stuart Mills (one of the most famous and influential British philosophers of the nineteenth century) especially his work on utilitarianism, liberty and representative government. In it, he claims that the good form of government was representative government because it promoted liberty, equity, and fraternity, made men look beyond their immediate interest. Further, it recognised the just demands of other men; promote political education, participation and communication. Furthermore, he asserts that local government is a prime element of democracy and demonstrates the intrinsic values of democracy, irrespective of the services it provides in it. Government is truly representative when all types of people can take part. The local government level offers the closest things to widespread consultation and participation.

British and America governments are based on the tenets of democracy and representative government and the local government level is a haven for such activities. Local governments in such entities and indeed other advanced western countries, function to bring about democracy and to provide opportunities for political participation to the citizenry as well as to educate and socialise them politically. Politics, indeed development, is about making choices through informed opinion, conflicts and conflict resolution and these should be the priorities of local government.

A very important part of this democratic role is the opportunity it creates for political activity and social interaction. Such a forum helps to inculcate the ideals of democracy like election or selection of local government committee and boards, public debates, pressure and interest group activities, and community mobilization.

Efficiency Services School

The proponents of the efficiency services school hold the tenet that democracy advocated by Mills and Bricks do not apply to different political system in the same manner, especially in the face of modern realities.

The crux of this theory is that the main purpose of local government is to provide services to the local people. Foremost among the advocates is the French scholar Langrod (1953) who opined that democracy was the affairs of the nation state as a whole and that issues of majority rule, equity and uniformity are the norm. Local self-government by contrast was parochial and concerned with local differences and separation. The two are opposed and it was only a historical accident that

they had developed together in the 19th century. He went on to say that it was equally false to see local government as a setting for political education and democracy. To him, the local government has only succeeded in breeding few national leaders. Local politics is more likely to reinforce narrow sectional interest than an appreciation of democracy. The citizen is more likely to learn about democracy from national politics and national issues.

Comparative Perspectives

There are various factors that are responsible for differences in the structure, establishment Functions as well as finance of Local government in Britain and Nigeria. Local government is conceived to mean government at the grassroot level that is expected to carries out certain functions and responsibilities and also serves as a link that fill the lacuna between the upper levels of governments- State/regional and central/federal government.

In these two countries – Britain and Nigeria, it is datum that the latter was colonized by the former and inherited/adopted her bureaucratic administrative system at Independence, yet there are lots of variances in effectiveness and efficiency in the area of service delivery, functioning and institutions of local government.

This paper examines some of the various factors that accounted for these differences between the colonial mother (Britain) and her independent colony(Nigeria). And deduce series of lessons that Nigeria can learn from Britain to attain the level in which her local government will be efficient and effective in their service delivery.

In an attempt to deduce the rationale behind the variance in the administration of Local government in the two countries, the following criteria serve as basis of our comparative analysis.

Mode of Establishment

The establishment of Local government in Nigeria is quite different from how local authorities are established in Britain. In Nigeria, local governments are creation of State government with the approval of National Assembly (sec 7. of 1999 Constitution of federal republic of Nigeria). These provisions subordinated local government in Nigeria to other levels and shows that the state government can at its own whim and caprice decide

the establishment, structure, functions, composition, finance. In Britain, local authorities are established by act of parliament with defined functions and responsibilities coupled with adequate authorities and financial autonomy.

Functions of Local Government

In Britain, local authorities perform three broad functions:

- i. Environmental functions concern the citizens' immediate physical surrounding-road construction, provision and maintenance of street light, water supplies, recreational grounds, street clearing and refuse disposal.
- ii. Protective functions are those that deal with safety of citizens (police and fire services).
- iii. Personal services deal with individual well-being such as housing, education, libraries and museum, schools and health services. It should be noted that in Britain today, the most significant, complex and cumbersome function of local authorities is housing.

Local authorities can in addition acquire further power through delegated legislation or bye-law. They also have general powers to acquire land by agreement through the means of purchase, lease or exchange.

The urban councils could perform obligatory functions like conservation, street lighting, drainage and construction and maintenance of roads. Larger ones could also engage in water supply, street cleaning, refuse disposal, fire service and being in charge of primary schools.

In Nigerian the functions of local government include the following;

- i. The consideration and the making of recommendations to a state commission on economic planning or any similar body on the economic development of the state, particularly in so far as the area of authority of the council and of the state are affected, and proposals made by the said commission or body
- ii. Collection of rates, radio and television licenses
- iii. Establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds and homes for the destitute or infirm
- iv. Licensing of bicycle, trucks (other than mechanically propelled trucks), canoe, wheel barrow and carts
- v. Establishment, maintenance and regulation of slaughter houses, slaughter slabs markets, motor parks and public conveniences

- vi. Construction and maintenance of roads and street, street lightings, drains and other public highways, parks, gardens, open spaces, or such public facilities as may be prescribed from time to time by the House of Assembly of a State
- vii. Naming of road and street and numbering of houses
- viii. Provision and maintenance of public conveniences, sewage and refuse disposal
- ix. Registration of all births, deaths and marriages
- x. 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, and
- xi. Control and regulation of:
 - a. out-door advertising and boarding
 - b. movement and keeping of pets of all description, shops and kiosks restaurants, bakeries and other places for sale of food to the public
 - c. laundries; and
 - d. licensing regulation and control of the sale of liquor.
 - e. provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education centre
 - f. development of agriculture and natural resources, other than minerals resources
 - g. provision and maintenance of the health services, and such other functions as may be conferred on a local government council by the house of assembly of the state.

The Status of Local Government

There are two types of structure related to the status of local governments. First is a single-tier (multi-purpose) structure in which only one authority is recognized by law at the local level. Any other arrangement under local government is a matter of administrative convenience. A good example of this is the Nigeria local government system which is described as single tier. However the multi-tier system in which the authorities under the local government like district, counties, borough, special district, home rule etc are recognized by the law and related with appropriately by the central/sate government operates in retain

Local governments in Britain are principally referred to as local authorities. They are created by an act of parliament. Even though there are various forms of control, the idea of democratic self-government is a serious form in the power structure of these authorities. The government however hesitates to give appreciable

autonomy or independence to these units because such may act as distractions in the face of the social, economic and political unity needed by Britain as it forges integration democratically and with the rest of Europe.

Despite this fundamental hold on local governments, in practice, things are not as tight as it may seem (because of this general disposition to make the system work and the powers local governments derive from acting *intra vires*). For example, Pollard reports that "local authorities in Britain are not emanations of the State but are responsible bodies, competent to discharge their own functions and although they may be the statutory body through which government policy is given effect and may operate to a large extent with government money, they exercise their own responsibility in their own right, not ordinarily as agents of government departments".

This means that government, having given their local authorities certain powers and functions by statutes, thereafter allows these authorities to discharge their functions without interference as long as they do so effectively and justifiably.

In Nigeria context, the functions, responsibilities, finance and structure of local government are at the whim and caprice of the state government as entrenched in Sec. 7 of 1999 Nigerian constitution. The local governments in Nigeria are not given autonomy to perform their function, this manifest in various forms of measures adopted to control the activities of the Local Government by various state governments in Nigeria such as Ministry of local government which determines the approval or otherwise of local government Budget, projects etc.

Political Involvement

The political office holders in Britain are those who considered the positions as an avenue to render selfless services to the community and not an avenue to enrich their family member as a result of the truth that the political environment in Britain is mature with participative and evaluative political orientation, with a clear understanding of the need to have a developed socio-political society. Unlike what is obtainable in Nigeria, political offices are used to compensate political stooges of the governor of the state, or the party faithful who have one way or the other contributed to party or the political machineries/tools for compensation, which made the political office holders to listen to the direction/voice of their godfathers at the detriment of the society.

Corruption

Another area of interest in our comparative analysis is the level of corruption in the two countries. High level of corruption in Nigeria local government which range from mismanagement of local government fund, embezzlement of funds, siphoning of local government fund, un-merit employment or job placement as a result of lack of institutions to check corrupt practices at local government level, in Britain, there are legal institutions that ensure transparent and accountability in the local government system, though this may be due to the advanced environment in which local government authorities operates in Britain.

Finance/Funding

Local authorities in Britain raise much of their funding through rates, investments, fees, and charges, they also get some funding or grants from the central government towards particular activities primarily road construction, other revenue generated aside central grants will be used on the following services; water supply, waste water treatment, public transport, public libraries, museums and art and galleries, rubbish collection, waste disposal and recycling and even community housing..etc . In Nigeria context, local governments rely heavily on federal allocations from the federation account which goes through the state government out of which the state government take substantial proportion to maintain large army of political thugs and assassins’.

CONCLUSION

The local government system in Britain and in Nigeria cannot be efficient at the same level as a result of various factors which interplay in the two countries which range from system of government adopted, level of political orientation, corruption, mode of establishment, status of local government, functions, finance and political undertone in the administration of local government in these countries.

These aforementioned factors have adverse effects on local government system in Nigeria than in Britain. So there is need to for local government administration in Nigeria to brace up despite certain differences between Britain and Nigeria.

It should not be over- emphasized that Britain colonized

Nigeria and such, Britain is operating in a more mature, advanced and developed political environment compared to Nigeria

Lessons for Nigeria

1. Local government system in Nigeria is a form of decentralization, while local authorities system in Britain is a form of devolution and local government with devolution of authority enjoys more autonomy than in decentralization. Local governments in Nigeria should be given adequate autonomy through constitutional review to enable them generate sufficient fund to cater for the communities within their jurisdiction.
2. Local government should stop spending on traditional institutions who contribute absolutely nothing to local administration, though they claim they are custodian of customs and traditions, there are clear evidences that traditional institutions have failed with emergence of Boko haram in the Northern part of the country and re-emergence of MASSOB unrest in the eastern part.
3. Local governments in Nigeria should not be seen as a dumping ground for politicians who are not sufficiently literate. The technical know-how in local government in Nigeria should be improved upon.
4. Evidences abound that the level of corruption is at minimal level in Britain, because the legal institutions there are strong, coherent and adaptable. In Nigeria such institutions are very weak and ineffective, public office holders steal public fund with impunity
5. The level of political culture in Britain is high as people participate in governance with less push, the local dwellers in Nigeria are suffering from political apathy, thereby not moved by happenings in their local government
6. Based on the level of development, local areas in Britain are cities in Nigeria and can easily generate adequate fund for developmental projects, essentially, most of the local governments in Nigeria are rural and semi-urban which can hardly generate enough fund to operate effectively on their own

Recommendations

The followings are some of the recommendations to enable Nigerian local government system improve in effective and efficient service delivery and to attain most of the reasons of its establishment which in turn lead to

national development in Nigeria.

1. Local government autonomy should be granted to enable local government determines the needs of the grassroot people and to seek for its own financial survival without other levels interference.
2. Political godfatherism should be eliminated to enable political office holders in Nigerian local government administration discharge their duties without fair or favour or being loyal to any god father. More so, godfatherism increase the cost of governance and thereby reduce the available fund for developmental projects.
3. Constitutional review to revisit the mode of establishment of local government in Nigeria and to ensure the autonomy of local government and there should be provision for constitutional functions of local government in Nigeria.
4. Even development should be encouraged to curb rural urban drift, most of the population that suppose to stay back in their local community has migrated to urban area as a result of low level of development in the rural areas.
5. Traditional institutions should be eliminated in as local government spent developmental fund to maintain a almost non existing traditional institutions.
6. National Orientation Agency and other agencies should embark on massive political orientation to change political disposition of local dwellers in Nigeria.

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