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LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORMS AND URBAN/RURAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN NIGERIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

The slow pace of socio-economic and physical development planning in Nigeria has been closely associated with the ineffective nature of local government administration models previously operated in the country. Since attainment of Independence in 1960, the local governments have not exercised any significant degree of autonomy. Their functions were often performed by the state governments which were not sufficiently close to the local communities. The 1976 local government reform did stand out clearly as the most revolutionary and comprehensive effort towards not only introducing a uniform system of local government administration in Nigeria, but also establishing an appreciable degree of autonomy for local governments. However, the contents of that policy document have remained largely unimplemented.

The paper explores the implications of the 1976 reform and its more recent variants, especially as they relate to urban and rural development as well as physical planning in Nigeria. It attempts to demonstrate that the autonomy and viability of local government authorities are central to their effectiveness in discharging their basic responsibilities to local communities.

INTRODUCTION

The major impediments to grassroots development of town and country planning in Nigeria have been associated with the recurring problems in the local government administration in the country. This association has been made purely on the basic premise that the local government as the third and lowest tier of government, is in the best position to deal with development and planning functions at the grassroots. These functions which are particularly neglected in less developed countries are very essential for both physical and socio-economic development of any nation. Although the functions cover a wide range of urban services, the following are easily identifiable: property rate collection, development control, sewage disposal, solid waste management and disposal, maintenance of arterial roads, control of local traffic and transportation facilities, control of land held by customary tenure, and management of public housing projects, where applicable.
In effect, local government administration functions are considerably crucial for socio-economic development and planning at the grassroots. It is therefore pertinent to ask the following questions: What are the problems of local government administration that have affected physical planning and socio-economic development at the grassroots? How have these problems adversely affected physical planning functions in the country? How can these essential local government functions be made more effective? The answers to the above questions will provide the framework for this paper.

The objectives of this research are as follows:
(i) To examine the problems inhibiting effective operation of local governments in Nigeria, especially as they relate to socio-economic development and planning functions at the grassroots.
(ii) To put forward suggestions for alternative approaches towards effective implementation of planning functions in both the urban and rural areas.

Problems Of Local Government Administration In Nigeria

Before the 1976 Local Government Reform, several local government systems had existed in Nigeria. This was essentially because local government had become a regional or state subject under the 1951 Nigerian Constitution. Except for some minor variations, the 1976 Reform was the most revolutionary and comprehensive attempt by the Federal Government at evolving a uniform system of local government set-up in Nigeria. It was indeed a bold attempt at creating autonomous, viable and grassroots governments in the country. It has also been variously referred to as the first attempt to far towards making 'local government work' in Nigeria (Egonawan, 1984). However, the real problem is that the realisation of the aims and objectives of the Reform has remained largely elusive. In order to clearly understand the constraints to implementation of the 1976 Reform, it may be pertinent to examine the problems that actually led to its introduction in the first place.

Prior to the 1976 Local Government Reform, local governments throughout the federation did not exercise any appreciable degree of autonomy. This was caused by overcentralization of power at the federal and state government levels. The Nigerian governmental structure was in essence characterized by centralized administrative machinery and weak local governments. The consequences of lack of autonomy by the local government were quite considerable. First, they had to operate under a structure that did not enhance development of local initiative (ibid). Most of the major ideas that were locally initiated, had to be cleared with the state government. This "top-down" administrative approach was indeed detrimental to enhancement of local resources and initiative, and hence to the development process in general.

The second major consequence of lack of autonomy for local governments was inadequate financial resources. Poor funding for local governments resulted in immense limitation to the scope of physical and socio-economic development activities at the grassroots. However, local government functions such as provision of basic infrastructure, social services and other planning activities required heavy mechanical equipment and materials which usually needed huge recurrent expenditure outlays.
Because local governments continued to operate with highly limited financial resources, they were considerably ineffective.

The third consequence of lack of autonomy for local governments, and which is very much related to the second consequence, was the issue of inadequate staffing and manpower within the local government service. The staff deployed in local government offices were grossly inadequate for the immense responsibilities and challenges that were prevalent in these areas. Moreover, the state government staff posted to the local government areas did not owe much allegiance to the local governments to which they were attached. In most cases, many of them were not indigenes of the area. Even when they were indigenes of the area, they were often more obliged to give priority to the directives from their employers at the state government headquarters.

The above issues were indeed responsible for the teething problems of rural local government areas and their communities which became increasingly impoverished as the pace of rural-urban migration intensified. It was not surprising therefore that the rural areas in Nigeria were not only becoming impoverished but were degenerating physically even in the face of programmes specifically targeted at rural development. The solutions to these problems did for long baffle the imagination and ingenuity of policy makers in the country. It was these problems that the Local Government Reform of 1976 was designed to address. Perhaps it will be pertinent at this juncture to briefly review the basic framework of this reform.

**THE 1976 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM IN NIGERIA**

The most important issue in the 1976 Local Government Reform is that the Federal Government constitutionally recognised local government as the third tier government below the state government. Under the reform, local governments were to have financial capabilities, staffing and institutional frame work to initiate and provide relevant services to their communities. Moreover, they were to have adequate resources to stimulate development at the grassroots (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1976). This was the most basic rationale for the reform.

Another objective of the reform was enhancement of public participation at the local level. This was to be achieved through involvement of communities in the running of popularly elected local government councils. These were to be operated on a representative basis, and were also to enhance local leadership potentials and initiative in self help. Moreover, another objective of the reform was to ensure that basic services and infrastructure were provided at the local and community levels (ibid).

However, the realisation of the above objectives would not be possible without feasible and realistic strategies. Some major strategies were, therefore, developed for the implementation of the reform. The nature of the strategies and the extent to which they succeeded in achieving the stated objectives are discussed in the following section.

**Strategies For Implementation Of The Reform**

The major strategies recommended for the implementation of the 1976 local government reform included a number of far-reaching measures which are briefly discussed in the following paragraphs.
Larger units of single-tiered local governments were created (ibid). The sizes of local governments were to range from 150,000 to 800,000. Before this period, there were no guidelines on the sizes of local governments. Some local government units were unnecessarily unwieldy while some others were not only too small but very much unviable.

Functions of state and local governments were being simultaneously carried out by both the state and local governments. This had given rise to incapacitation of the local governments. However, with the separation of functions each tier of government was assigned some exclusive functions. For local governments, these exclusive functions included provision of markets, motor parks, property rate collection, regulation and control of alcoholic drinks, provision of local and community recreation areas, and several other functions (ibid). The concurrent functions included provision of non-trunk roads and streets, rural and semi-urban water supply, health centres and clinics, primary school education, nursery and adult education centres as well as some other functions.

The guidelines for local government reform clearly specified the formula for statutory allocation of revenues and granting of loans to local governments. Out of the total government allocations 25 percent was to be shared on the basis of equality of local governments. The other 75 percent was to be shared on the basis of population. The allocations were mainly block grants. Moreover, loan funds were to be established by state government with a view to granting loans to local governments. These were to enable them borrow money cheaply for their development projects.

Local sources of finance were to be created for local governments. These included property rating, flat rate taxes on people not in the Pay-As-You-Earn (PAYE) tax system, development capital rates and other related fees.

Moreover, steps were to be taken to introduce some measure of uniformity between different local government units. This would have to be achieved without necessarily jeopardising efficiency.

The divisional system of administration was to be discontinued. Instead of administering the local governments from the state governments by the use of Divisional Officers (D.O.'s), local governments were to be administered by elected chairmen and councillors from the respective areas. In addition, development projects were to be handled by Local Government Coordinating Committees instead of Divisional Officers.

In order to take care of the varying needs of local governments from the time they are newly set up to the period they have become mature, two types of personnel systems were proposed. In the first system, local governments could have the responsibility of making appointments to professional, administrative and technical positions. The appointments would be based on expert guidance of the Local Government Service Board which is a department of the state government. In the second system, the Local Government Service Board will be responsible for making appointments, promotions and
transfers of staff. Local governments may have minor input over staff postings and may also exercise minor disciplinary powers over their staff. This would only be a temporary measure.

However, the second system was to be operational only at the initial stages of the new local government system. As soon as the local governments become adequately experienced they will adopt the unified local government system.

(b) The range of functions to be performed by the new local governments would be such that they would need support services from the state governments. Some of these support services would be technical, professional and financial. The guidelines provided that the Ministry of Local Government in every state should be responsible for providing these support services. These support services included the following issues: identification of range of functions for the local governments, adequate staffing, overseeing matters related to the finances of the local governments as well as providing assistance and guidance in performance of community development functions. These would include provision and maintenance of basic infrastructural facilities.

(i) The guidelines of the 1976 reform provided that state field professional officers would be involved in local government council matters that would concern them. In effect, they could attend council meetings to advise on issues that are relevant to their professional and technical assignments.

Post 1976 Local Government Reforms
Since the 1976 local government reform, some other attempts have been made towards improvement of the local government system in Nigeria. However, these later attempts have basically been modifications and extensions of the 1976 reform.

The spirit of the 1976 Local Government Reform which was largely adopted in the 1979 Constitution, was not quite protected by the civilian regime of President Shitu Shagari. Local government interests were neglected in several ways. However, with the take-over of government by the military administration of Major General Buhari, a 21-man committee was appointed to review the local government administration in Nigeria. This measure was aimed at correcting the mistakes of the last civilian regime. The end-product of that exercise was restoration of the local government system to conform with the provisions of the 1979 Constitution.

Moreover, the subsequent military administration of General Babangida has taken measures towards improvement of local government administration in Nigeria. The administration did set in motion a constitutional machinery for setting up the Constituent Assembly, to which it mandated to review the 1979 Constitution. Among the specific tasks of the Assembly was review of the local government system in Nigeria. The Assembly had since completed its assignments and become disbanded. Among other things, it made important recommendations towards review of the local government system in Nigeria. However, suffice it to state that these recommendations were very much in line with the original spirit of the 1976 Local Government Reform as enshrined in the 1979 Constitution. In effect, the 1976 Local Government Reform has remained a landmark for local government reforms in Nigeria.
THE IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Enhanced autonomy to local governments has far-reaching consequences. It will erase greater powers to those governments to control their own affairs. Indeed, enhanced autonomy may well be the major determinant of the viability of local governments. The implications of such an enhanced autonomy are significant. They include the following considerations: increased and more diversified access to funding, increased socio-economic activities in the local government areas, and enhanced opportunity for rural development. It is perhaps pertinent to briefly discuss each of these.

Increased And More Diversified Access To Funding

Undoubtedly, funding is one of the major issues that are crucial to the effectiveness of any organisation. Before the 1976 Reform, local governments depended mainly on allocation from state governments. They had little or no direct access to federal funds. Federal government subventions to the local governments had to be channelled through the state governments, which occasionally diverted some of the funds to other pressing needs. Moreover, some of the allocations from the federal government were often meagre. The 1976 local government reform therefore provided for creation of more sources of finances for local governments. These sources included collections from property rates, development capitalisation rates and flat rate taxes on people outside the pay-as-you-earn tax system, as well as user charges at the markets, motor parks and other related facilities provided by the local governments. That single measure can be said to be a major determinant of the viability of local governments.

Increased Socio-Economic Activities In The Local Government Areas

Availability of more funds in the local government areas implies availability of more capital for enhancement of socio-economic activities in those areas. This is indeed a very important consideration especially since capital is a very important factor of production. Expansion of socio-economic activities will result in increased demand for labour and therefore increase in employment opportunities in the relevant geographical areas.

Enhanced Opportunity For Urban And Rural Development

The nature of the socio-economic activities that result from increased capital at the local government areas will depend on whether the areas concerned are urban or rural in nature. For those that are urban, the effect may be further expansion in the economies of scale in those urban areas. Those areas develop more to become larger urban communities. For rural areas, the effects will be even more phenomenal and diverse.

Increased socio-economic activities at the rural local government areas will stir up considerable rural development efforts. The rural communities that hitherto have been characterised by agricultural employment activities will begin to witness economic diversification efforts that would take the form of small-scale industrial activities and commercial enterprises. In fact, it was for the basic reason that local governments are essential for rapid rural development programmes in Nigeria that the present military administration of General Buhari took further measures towards improvement of
the local government system in Nigeria. The first measure was increase in the number of local governments in Nigeria from 301 to 449. The second measure was the recent increase in the local governments' share of the federation account from 10 percent to 15 percent.

Diversification of employment opportunities in rural areas has its own set of consequences. Prominent among these consequences is the issue of reduction in migration of labour from the rural to urban areas. In effect, if properly implemented, the local government reforms can become a sure way of stemming the tide of rural-urban migration - a problem which had hitherto appeared insoluble.

The Implications Local Government Reforms For Physical Planning

Enhanced local autonomy which will likely result from recent local government reforms would be a great boost not only for the socio-economic development process but also for physical planning activities. Availability of more funds to comparatively more autonomous local governments would ensure more funding for development purposes and would also immensely enhance the chances of higher level of financial support for physical planning activities. This is because physical planning is essential for all physical development activities. In effect, proper physical development activities which, among other things, include road and street development, housing layout development, community facility provision and drainage facility construction usually have to start from physical planning. This is only one aspect of the issue.

Secondly, higher level of financial support for physical planning activities will eventually result in expansion of the operations of town planning authorities where they exist. It will also necessitate setting up such town planning authorities where they do not already exist. Functional planning authorities are essential for a number of reasons. Such authorities will ensure that the image of town planning is adequately portrayed and that its functions are adequately carried out. The point being made here is that unless there are planning authorities administered by qualified town planners, it is most likely that planning functions will be relegated to the background. Moreover, establishment of town planning authorities will ensure that funds earmarked for town planning functions are not diverted to other uses.

Thirdly, closely related to the above issue is the fact that town planning authorities operating as separate departments will greatly enhance the chances of viability of such authorities. This is because appreciable proportion of funds raised from such town planning fees as building plans, inspection fees and development rates will be available to the authorities.

Fourthly, availability of more funds for local planning authorities and for physical planning will enhance the chances of better staffing for those authorities. Town planning offices in many local government areas are currently headed by middle-level and lower-level professional staff. However, town planning authorities need, indeed to be headed by professionals on grade levels 14 and 15 or higher. It is rather disheartening to notice that in some rural local government areas, town planning offices are even headed by technicians on grade level 07 and below.

Fifthly, higher level of funding as well as engagement of higher calibre of manpower would make it feasible to provide and utilize more operational facilities.
Present, some local governments do not have facilities for preparation of layout schemes, village plans and amenity spaces. They depend mainly on facilities from the state governments for execution of such jobs. Very often town planning authorities in some local government areas do not even have adequate office space. Where office spaces are available, design equipment, taping papers, report-writing facilities and other planning equipment are not provided on a continuous basis.

Sixthly, financial provision for facilities and amenities in the local government areas through local government reforms will greatly facilitate current efforts towards improvement of the physical environment in these areas. Since environmental protection and improvement are part and parcel of the functions of physical planners, local government reform efforts can also be said to be capable of immensely promoting physical planning in Nigeria. Local governments will be in a better position to become much more involved in issues connected with environmental management.

Recommendations And Conclusion

Measures aimed at promoting local government reforms in Nigeria should be vigorously pursued to logical conclusion. Constitutional measures that do not give the proper right of place to local governments should be discouraged. They are indeed detrimental to the development process.

Effective local government reforms in Nigeria will have very important and far-reaching consequences. Such reforms will facilitate efforts towards extension of governance to the grassroots and hence enhance the local populace as active participants in the development process. The medium and long term effects of the measures would be accelerated socio-economic development of the pertinent local communities. Although urban and rural communities alike will benefit immensely from the measures, the effect on rural communities will be much more phenomenal. The effect of progressive local government reforms on physical planning in Nigeria will be immense. Greater autonomy to local governments will result in better chances of funding for physical planning activities. Availability of more funds for local governments will enhance the chances of more viable and functional planning authorities. Moreover, better access to funding will result not only in more viable physical planning authorities but also in better quality of staff and better access to more operational facilities for such authorities. Additionally, our environments will have better chances of improvement. Indeed, all the above considerations are germane to successful urban/rural development and physical planning efforts in Nigeria.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


