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LOCAL GOVERNMENT OR RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A PRIORITIZATION AGENDA FOR NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

This study examined the meaning and highlighting the differences between local government and rural development; it also reviewed the functions that have been traditionally considered as local government functions and those that need to be performed to ensure rural development in Nigeria within the periods of 2010-2020. Using data generated through secondary sources and subjected to descriptive analysis, these two sets of functions were analyzed and the level of government appropriate for their performance determined. After data presentation and analysis, the paper finds out that both local government and rural development are two different and essential activities of modern day governments and deserved appropriate attention in order to achieve all round development at the grassroots in Nigeria. The study therefore recommends that for ease and economy of execution of projects, it is more advantageous for rural development to be undertaken by a higher level of government and to precede local governments as we embark on a journey into the third millennium.

Keywords: Local Government, Rural Development, Prioritization Agenda, and 21st Century

Introduction

In the area of local government and rural development, what Nigeria inherited from her colonial past was an admixture of both. There was a strong local government system captioned Native Authority, through which the colonialists indirectly (Indirect Rule) governed rural Nigeria.

There was also the Divisional/District Administration system through which the central government (regional, not federal) undertook rural development activities directly itself. Under this system, numerous regional government ministries/departments existed in each division and even district and undertook development projects. Popular amongst such ministries were the ministries of works (which build and maintained rural roads, residential and office buildings, etc.), ministries of health, education (education still has a strong presence in local government areas) etc. (Omale, 2005).

What this meant was that, the local government system was expected to do much less than now that it is an autonomous third tier of government. Oyigbenu(2012) observed that the third tier and autonomous status of local governments came into existence in a reform popularly known as the Dasuki Local Government Reform of 1976 (named after its Chairman who was then the Sultan of Sokoto). With this came increased emphasis on local government as governance and unfortunately less emphasis on local government as undertaker of rural projects.

It was to correct this anomaly of decreased attention to rural development, that in the decade of the 80s, the Federal Government set up agencies and directorates to undertake rural development. The most prominent amongst them was the Babangida creation known as the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI).

On this basis, this study examined the meaning and

highlighting the differences between local government and rural development; it also reviewed the functions that have been traditionally considered as local government functions and those that need to be performed to ensure rural development in Nigeria within the periods of 2003 to 2017.

Statement of the Problem

Local government and rural development have traditionally been conceived as almost the same side of the same coin in the process of development. However, both as concepts and in the context of their practice, local government and rural development are two different things. Seen as two different things, rural development can take place without local government and there can be an excellent system of local government without rural development. The problem that this study focuses attention on is that rural development has not been satisfactorily undertaken in Nigeria lately because the process of souring has been taken alone with local Government. Put differently, but this time, in an interrogative form; if the rural infrastructures and services provided by the federal and state governments are the developmental needs of our rural areas, should they not be given priority attention over and above the setting up and development of local government structures and apparatuses. This is the problem being investigated in this study.

Objective of the Study

The main aim of this study is to define and highlight the differences between local government and rural development and to review the functions that have been traditionally considered as local government functions and those that need to be performed to ensure rural development. These two sets of functions will be analyzed and the level of government appropriate for their performance determined. Since local government and rural development are both important aspects of government and deserving attention, the paper will recommend which should receive what amount, and what urgency of attention as we embark on a journey into the third millennium A.D.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In this section deals with the conceptual issues, literature review and theoretical framework on the subject matter of local government and rural development.

The Concept of Local Government

The term “local government” is defined in various ways by scholars and practitioners of community governance, politics and development. It’s therefore, a fact that the concept elicits plethora of perspectives among scholars of political science, public administration and development studies. In his remark, Awofeso (2003,p.1) stressed that, “whether described as the government of the local level, the lowest tier of government, the government at the grassroots levels or the closet government to the people as variedly defined by different scholars and authors”.

Local government can be described as some government bodies elected by the people that have administrative, legislative and executive functions on the territories under their jurisdiction. It is defined as an authority that decides or determines certain measures within a given territory. Actually, to know the answer of the questions like, what is local government? It is necessary to analysis the view and opinion of some scholars and expert in the field of public administration and political science.

In political term, local government is concerned with the governance of a specific local area, constituting political sub division of a nation, state or other major political unit. The local government is administrative body for a small geographic area, such as a city, town, county, or state. A local government will typically only have control over their specific geographical region, and cannot pass or enforce laws that will affect a wider area (Ujo, 2015).

Hesluck (1993) as quoted in Stewart (2000), local government is the government of difference, responding to different needs, and realizing different aspirations.

"There must be a definite power to do things in a different manner from that followed in other areas within the same of state area. If some local body has it in its power to govern in a different manner from other local bodies, there we have Local Government".

Local government is part of the government of a country which deals mainly with problems or issues related to a given population within a given territory. This is done basically on the responsibilities of a country that parliament decides to delegate by the laws to local governance. In this definition we find two important elements of local government, that of the existence of directly elected local bodies and local finances, which constitute common denominators of each local government. Clarke (Aijaz, 2007).

Similarly, Sidgwick (2014) considers local government as government of some sub organs that have special powers to issue regulations or rules within the area which they manage. So Sedgwick connects this government with its legislative character.

Local government has been defined as the lowest unit of administration to whose laws and regulation, the communities who live in a defined geographical area and with common social and political tiers are subjects (Ugwu, 2000:1). In similar sense, Ogunna (1996, p.1) indicated that, "Local government is a form of devolution of political powers of the state. It is the government of the grassroots which is designed to serve as an instrument for rural development.

Furthermore, Awofeso (2003, p.3) identified the definitional attributes of local government, as obvious under the following:

- i. An organized entity with distinct territorial boundaries.
- ii. A corporate and legal personality with powers to perform some specified functions.
- iii. A system of representation through election of principal officers, effective citizen participation and in-built accountability.
- iv. Substantial autonomy over finance and staffing with limited and complementary central control.

To this extent, local government is administrative machinery established to govern and develop the people at the community or local level. Hence, local government is established to mobilize rural people towards governance and stimulate socio-economic and industrial development of the rural areas.

Precisely, local government is a purposeful institution. It is therefore created to respond to peculiar challenges and expectations. In this vein, Fajiobi (2010, p.4) explicitly outlined the need or purpose for local government:

- i. Government at the Door Steps: By the creation of local government, the local communities are thus afforded the opportunities having self-government at their door step or within their reach.
- ii. Local Talents: when local people do things themselves; local talents will be identified and those will be used for considerable advantages at a comparative level.
- iii. Local government plays an important role in the provision of essential services to its people e.g. markets, dispensaries, roads etc.
- iv. Community projects are often developed and undertaken since the central government cannot provide all the services needed by the people. This may be due to transport difficulties, cultural differences and of course ignorance of the government officials. Thus, local government makes for flexibility and experimentation in that it allows local communities to discretionally provide services for their peculiar needs through communal efforts.
- v. Local government is said to provide local people a classroom for political education in a citizenship and in training future leaders.
- vi. It affords a considerable opportunity for contribution to national development.

A cursory examination of the established functions indicated that local government emerged to respond to the needs of the community people through administration of social welfare and socio-economic development of the rural people. And one of such expectation is ensuring adequate health care service for the community people.

To summarize this section, it is pertinent to note that both as a concept and as a practice, local government could differ from country to country and even from place to place within the same country. Thus, whereas there seems to be the laying of emphasis on the fact that generally local governments are creatures of state governments, the Nigerian experience is vastly departing from such a pattern and tending to one in which local governments are creatures of the tier of government exercising the dominant authority, which in today, Nigeria is the federal government. To govern in a different manner from other local bodies, there we have Local Government". (Hesluck 1936 as quoted in Stewart 2000

The Concept of Rural Development

The term "rural development" connotes overall development to improve the quality of life of the rural people. Bello-Imam (1998), in this vein, defined rural development as spatially sectional but determined and conscious attempt to focus on the general upliftment of the living conditions of men in the rural areas. So, rural development in Nigeria entails the process of making life more satisfying and fulfilling to the millions of Nigerians who live in the rural areas.

Harris (1982; p.8), citing the World Bank definition of Rural development, as "a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people – the rural people." He identified four major factors, namely: increased concerns about the persistent and deepening rural poverty; changing views on the meaning of the concept of development; emergence of a more diversified rural economy in which rural non-farm enterprises play an increasing important role; and increase recognition of the importance of reducing the non-income dimensions of poverty to achieve sustainable improvements in the socio-economic well-being of the poor.

Olayide, et al (1981), in their views, opined that rural development is a process whereby concerted efforts are made in order to create significant increase in rural resources productivity with the central objective of

enhancing rural income and creating employment opportunity in rural communities for rural dwellers to remain in the rural area. It is also an integrated approach to food production, provision of physical, social and institutional infrastructure with an ultimate goal of bringing about good healthcare delivery system, affordable and quality education, improved and sustainable agriculture etc.

Mabogunje, in Olumodeji (1990:p.21), clarified rural development as being:

concerned with the improvement of the living standards of the low-income populations living in rural areas on a self-sustaining basis, through transforming the socio-spatial structures of its productive activities. It should be distinguished from Agricultural development which it entails and transcends, for that is concerned with one aspect of the productive live.

This definition shows how embracing it is and that it agrees with the encompassing nature of the rural area as it engulf every sphere that may bring to the success of rural development.

Based on the foregoing, it is obvious that scholars tilt the concept of rural development toward their area of specialization and perhaps, interest hence the assertion that the concept lacks a unified definition. However, these views emphasize the central point that rural development is about promoting the welfare, productivity and the social well-being of rural communities, about the scope and quality of participation of rural people in that process, about the structure, organization, operations and interactions and facilities which make this possible.

The next segment focuses on the functions of local governments. In this case, rural development functions are not already included in the existing local government functions; it is therefore suggest that they never be. However, in case local governments are already charged with these rural development functions, the paper argues that local governments are inappropriate tier of

government to handle such functions.

Local Government Functions

The most authentic source of a listing of local government functions as at now is the Fourth Schedule to the 1979 and the Fourth Schedule to the 1999 Constitutions of Nigeria. Cataloguing the functions here will be a boring exercise; suffice it to note that out of the list of primary functions listed under rural development above, local government is mandated to undertake the following as contained in Section 1 of the schedule - 4th Schedule to the 1979 and 1999 Constitutions: - construction and maintenance of roads, streets, drains and other public highways, parks, open spaces or such public facilities as may be prescribed from time to time by the House of Assembly of a State:

And at subsection (2) it is stated that:

The functions of a local government council shall Include participation of such council in the Government of a State as respects the following matters, namely: -

- i. The provision and maintenance of primary education;*
- ii. The development of agriculture and natural resources, other than the exploitation of minerals;*
- iii. The provision and maintenance of health services; and*
- iv. Such other functions as may be conferred on a local government council by the House of Assembly of the State.*

Of course a local government has power to undertake various other functions such as collection of taxes and rates naming of streets and numbering of houses, registration of births and deaths, as well as marriages, control and regulation of advertisements, shops, kiosks, restaurants, and movement of pets, etc. These latter functions which, to a community of people, do not constitute matters of life or death, so to say, are what we would wish to classify here as secondary needs.

As can be seen from the functions listed for a local

government in the Fourth Schedule of the Constitution a number of them are in the category of primary, basic needs of a rural area. Such functions as road construction and maintenance, provision and maintenance of primary schools, health and agricultural services, potable water, electricity etc., we argue should be considered as national functions which should be handled by state and federal governments and not be left on the laps of local governments and also, we argue that attention to them should have priority over the attention to local governments.

Why Local Government Inappropriate for Rural Development?

A rural area like an urban area can be likened to a living organism, indeed to a living human being with various needs - a hierarchy of needs to borrow from Maslow. The lower level needs (which we have called primary or basic needs here), have the potential to "kill" the organism if they are not satisfied. Thus, rural areas as organisms die (physically cease to exist) if their basic needs are not met. Basic needs also have the characteristics of being emergent, i.e., their fulfillment calls for urgent attention if the organism is not to die.

Now, on account of their dire lack of resources of manpower, equipment and finances, local governments are inappropriate for undertaking the functions that satisfy the basic needs of rural Nigeria let alone do so with immediacy. One can argue that if these resources are available to federal and state governments, they can be made available to local governments for the purpose of rural development, and that this done, the basic needs can be provided with immediacy. In the opinion of Oyigbenu (2015), such an argument is not tenable for the following reasons:

Firstly, the activities necessary for provision of rural basic needs are so equipment (technology) intensive that it would be financially impossible and if possible; wasteful to avail each local government the equipment needed for the prosecution of rural development programmes. Not only is it overbearingly costly in its initial outlay, it is more so in its maintenance cost.

One needs to take stock of the number' of abandoned road equipment which are the properties of federal and state governments as well as those of large construction companies to appreciate the technology (or lack of it) that goes into equipment maintenance. Thus, if a federal or state government or a viable private company is hardly capable of maintaining road construction equipment: availing such equipment to a local government is tantamount to "junking" it (to use as American terminology).

Secondly, it is financially imprudent to prosecute rural development via local governments for two major reasons;

As single entities, local governments cannot attract big and reputable contractors to undertake projects on their behalf, therefore, projects undertaken by local governments (via contract) are usually handled by small ill-equipped contractors who turn in very sub-standard jobs or abandon the jobs mid-stream. For example, sometime in 1988, the Federal Government availed each local government in the country the some of N1 million for the construction of township roads. Roads constructed with such funds did not last one year before they pilled-off.

Secondly, the standard of the execution of work in each local government is partly a function of the expertise available to the technical personnel of the local governments. High caliber technical personnel are a rare commodity everywhere but much rarer at focal levels. This is one of the explanations of the poor work standards at local levels.

Thirdly, on account of the size of most local governments in Nigeria, and it is lamentable that the size of the average local government has decreased from 9,723.8 square km in 1975 to 3,079.2 square km in 1976 to 2,057.4 square km as of 1990 and 1,193 square km as at today; and therefore, on account of the size of their operations, they cannot attract and/or pay for high caliber staff. When this is added to the fact that 80, 7% of our local governments are in rural areas which are bereft of life-sustaining amenities, there is hardly

any wonder that not too many well educated and trained people choose to work at the local government level. This being the case, it is not expected that serious developmental activities can be feasibly entrusted to the hands of local governments.

If a sub-conclusion is to be drawn for this section of this paper, it is that local governments are inappropriate instruments for the undertaking of rural development activities because they lack the competence to do so and are not likely, on account of size and the dearth of life-sustaining amenities to acquire the needed competence in the near future.

Why and How Rural Development Should Precede Local Government

To talk of rural development preceding local government is to recognize the importance of both but to prioritize one over the other in programming or scheduling of functions. Obasanjo (2003) believed that "rural development should precede local government not only because rural development programmes or activities are more important and emergent, but because this is about the best way to bring about more meaningful and viable local governments".

Theoretical Framework

In this research, modernization theory was adopted as the guiding framework. The twentieth century has seen a critique refinement and even attempted synthesis of the ideas of Durkheim and his men (popularly known as modernization theorists). Modernization theory came to prominence in the early 1950's. The theory offers an account of the common features of the process of development, drawing on the analysis of Durkheim and other scholars. That is, the theory got its roots from the writings and intellectual ideas of Durkheim, Weber and others.

To understand the proposition of the modernization theory, we have to appreciate the genesis of Durkheim (1958) contention of development; that the development of complex modern society was from a simple

'primitive' past, and we must also understand his theory of social order and stability. For him, the crucial question was, how do people combine in stable group to form cohesive societies and what is their nature of relationship to one another, as society grows and becomes more complex?

The modernization theorists also referred to as development theorist among whom Huntington and Almond (Tenuche, 1992) make a distinction between what is traditional and 'backward' and what is 'modern' and forward looking. They argue that countries like the United States of America and Britain are examples of developed countries. They suggest that developing countries should not only strive to attain the level of development of these societies. According to Huntington (Tenuche, 1992) developed countries have attained a level of development because they possess high structural differentiation and cultural secularization. A society is structurally differentiated when it has a large number of expert administrative structures each specialized for specific purposes. Moreover, a set of political structure, political parties, election parliament, chief executives, and cabinets are designed to formulate rules and pose the targets which the administrative structures then implement. A developing society which is not structurally differentiated still relies on traditional institutions like chieftaincy and here lies the reason for their underdevelopment. This traditional institution is assumed cannot cope with the level of economic changes that occur within and around their societies.

According to Ajayi (1979) in Goulbourne (2015) the modernization theory places threat emphasis on the importance of the bureaucracy as an agent of modernization, a dominant role is thus assigned to the bureaucracy in the formulation and implementation of development programmes. Secularization which is required to attain a certain level of development is the process whereby men became increasingly rational, empirical and analytical in their political action. The secularization of culture, Huntington (1999) said is the process whereby traditional orientations and attitudes give way to more dynamic decision making processes involving the gathering up information, making a

rational choice among alternative courses of action and the means whereby one test whether the choice made is producing the consequences which were intended. Modernization theorists say third world countries are not developed because the belief system in these societies is still crude and does not make them open-up and accept new ideas. Planning for rural development since the colonial period in Nigeria has been influenced by the modernization theory. Rural development programmes therefore are usually designed and implemented by a bureaucratic network for the people. There is also a heavy reliance on foreign capital and technology for the development of rural sector.

Development of the rural sector is seen in terms of the injection of capital and technical expertise from developed societies into an underdeveloped society for it to develop. Such development programmes have included, in recent times, the Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), the Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs), the River Basin Development Programmes, the Family Support Programmes, National Economic Empowerment Development Strategies (NEEDS), etcetera. These programmes have not achieved the objectives for which they were established yet. The probable reason for this is perhaps due to the fact that the process for development adopted for these programmes were not self-generating and therefore could not be sustained. Though Frank (2009) sees development to be meaningful only when it is self-generating and self-penetrating. This suggests that rural development projects and programmes should emanate from within the people to be sustained.

However, the modernization theory is applied here as a guiding framework for the rural societies to mobilize themselves into development programmes that would better their lots.

Methodology

The research relied on secondary data drawn from an array of published and unpublished materials relevant to the study such as researches, journals, magazines, conferences, books, seminar papers and newspapers.

Other sources of secondary data were reports, official handbooks and other quantitative publications related to the problem of the study were all systematically analyzed. The method by which data were generated for this study was the secondary sources. There were qualitative soft publications and entries in recognized and official websites. Others include online version of international dailies, books, journals, reports, seminars and conference papers, national newspapers etc. Being a non-experimental research, the use of qualitative descriptive analysis was employed for the analysis of the generated data. In interpreting our data, the relationship between functional and sound administrative practices and national development in Nigeria was established at both theoretical and empirical levels. Empirically, we used a qualitative and historical method that was critical and analytical, providing descriptive and historical details. This was also complemented by descriptive qualitative analysis. The qualitative and historical

method provided us with clear perspective into our research problem by giving us the opportunity to understand the historical details and accurate account of the past and to use the past to discuss the present.

Discussion of Results

Prioritization makes sense because as we have repeatedly stated here and according to Wraith (1992), resources are inadequate for both rural development and local government to be given simultaneous attention. And since over 80% of Nigerian local governments are rural local governments, the attention given to either of the two deprives that given to the other. Let us show this empirically. A study of the pattern of expenditure of Obi Local Government of Nasarawa State for a period of thirteen (13) years was undertaken by this author. The findings are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Details of Recurrent and Capital Expenditure, 2003 - 2015

S/N	YEAR	RECURRENT (N)=	CAPITAL (N)
1	2009	11,461,959.00	1,218,185.00
2	2010	11,698,946.00	1,623,860.00
3	2011	12,100,541.00	-
4	2012	16,108,443.00	-
5	2013	16,356,100.00	-
6	2014	14,727,847.00	-
7	2015	14,107,484.00	-
8	2016	13,994,808.00	-
9	2017	18,541,457.00	170,508.00
10	2018	19,468,156.00	174,000.00
11	2019	18,976,999.00	137,533.00
12	2020	11,628,363.00	755,536.00
13	2021	18,355,379.00	1,177,085.00

Source: A compilation obtained from Obi Local Government Finance Department, 2021.

The table above shows that for a period of 6 years i.e., from 2009 to 2014 during which period the Obi Local Government had an average of N14.6 million per year in actual revenues, not a kobo was committed to capital works and yet expenditure on capital projects is the barometer for measuring the level of attention which is paid to development. For the whole period of 13 years during which the average income per year was N15.8

million, there was only an average of N51 million representing 2.61% of total income.

The expenditure pattern in Table 1 is not peculiar to Obi Local Government of Nasarawa State. In a study into Nsukka Local Government by Izeani (2010-2013), he discovered, as shown in Table 2 below that "for the 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 financial years, no capital expenditure was made".

Table 2: Nsukka Local Government Expenditure Pattern, 2010 – 2013

YEAR	ACTUAL EXPENDITURE (N)	RECURRENT EXPENDITURE (N)	CAPITAL EXPENDITURE (N)	PERSONAL EMOLUMENT (N)
2009/2010	2,806,910.00	2,494,020.00	312,890.00	-
2011	4,810,743.00	4,810,743.00	-	4,509,316.00
2012	2,649,797.00	2,649,797.00	-	2,502,721.00
2013	4,056,407.25	4,056,407.25	-	3,783,256.00

Source: Adopted from Izeani's (2010 – 2013) Analysis of the Annual Budgets of the Nsukka Local Government, 2021.

Again to show how wide-spread this pattern of almost complete neglect of capital (development) expenditure was, Ezeani (2010) observes that, “Nsukka Local Government was not alone in this trend. For instance, G.O. Orewa points out that Ahaka/Iki Local Government spent only 7% in capital projects in 2010. Ankpa in Senue spent only 11% in 2012 on capital projects and Ahoadain Rivers State spent only 9.4% on capital projects in 2013”.

What the facts and figures in the tables above show is the little or no attention that is paid to development activities by local governments. The story has not changed even in more recent years. The recurrent expenditure vis-à-vis capital expenditure profile of local governments in Kogi State in 2014/2015 tell the same story as shown in Tables 3 and 4 below. In neither of them, on average, is expenditure on capital projects anything to write home about where it exists, as in quite a number of local governments, it does not exist at all.

Table 3: Recurrent and Capital Expenditure of LGAs in Kogi State Which Showed “Actuals” in 2014

S/N	LGA	ACTUAL RECURRENT EXPENDITURE 2014 (N)	ACTUAL CAPITAL 2014 (N)	TOTAL EXPENDITURE (N)	% CAPITAL OVER TOTAL (N)
1	Ankpa	54,106,960.00	3,299,700.00	67,406,660.00	19.73
2	Bassa	25,208,000.00	3,199,790.00	28,407,790.00	11.26
3	Dekina	49,998,010.00	8,910,000.00	49,998,010.00	30.64
4	Idah	55,169,110.00	-	55,169,110.00	0.00
5	Kotonkarfe	20,165,680.00	-	29,075,680.00	0.00
6	YagbaEst.	31,716,690.00	829,356.00	32,546,046.00	2.55

Source: Computed by author from the annual budgets of the LGAs under reference, 2021

Yet a more recent set of recurrent and capital financial figures, this time of one L.G.A. from each of the

Senatorial Districts of Nasarawa State shown in Table 4 below tells a similar story.

Table 4: Recurrent Receipts and Capital Expenditure of Selected LGAs in Kogi State, 2015

S/N	LGA	TOTAL RECEIPTS	EXTIMATED CAPITAL EXPENDITURE (N)	ESTIMATED CAPITAL EXPENDITURE AS % OF TOTAL RECEIPTS (N)
1	Ankpa	157,106,360.00	13,299,700.00	8.28%
2	Bassa	257,208,360.00	11,199,790.00	4.28%
3	Dekina	249,998,010.00	18,910,000.00	7.23%
4	Idah	157,169,720.00	11,753,110.00	7.94%
5	Kotonkarfe	250,165,680.00	0	0%

6	Yagba Est.	571,155,700.00	114,875,000.00	2.01%
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Source: Computed by author from annual budgets of LGAs under reference, 2021

A further study of local government expenditure patterns (as contained in a study by this author) reveals the nature of items on which local government funds are spent and strengthens the case for de-emphasizing local governments meanwhile in favour of increased tempo on

rural development. The revelations of this study conducted into Zaria Local Government (see Table V below) were collaborated by that of Ezeani into Nsukka Local Government as shown in Table 2 above

Table 5: Zaria Local Government Expenditure Pattern, 2014 – 2017

YEAR	EXTIMATED TOTAL EXPENDITURE (N)	EXTIMATED PERSONAL EMOLUMENTS (N)	EXTIMATED OTHER CHARGES (N)	ESTIMATED CAPITAL (N)
2014	100,100,601.00	60,819,079.00 (67.5%)	30,290,522.00 (32.6%)	20,563,690.00 (25.4%)
2015	140,975,391.00	80,797,086.00 (58.7%)	60,178,305.00 (41.3%)	20,957,620.00 (19.7%)
2016	190,126,564.00	90,684,399.00 (50.1%)	90,442,165.00 (49.4%)	30,843,172.00 (20.1%)
2017	200,226,920.00	40,797,813.00 (23.7%)	150,429,107.00 (75.3%)	70,223,753.00 (35.7%)

Source: Computed by the researcher from Recurrent Estimates and Authorized Establishments of Zaria Local Government for the various years shown, 2021.

The pattern of local government expenditures reveals that by far the greater part of local government funds is spent on personal emoluments. More disturbing is the revelation that personal emoluments appear to be an elastic and insatiable item of expenditure. The Zaria Local Government expenditure pattern above as well as that of Nsukka in Table 2; shows that whenever the local government had increased income, the personal emolument expenditure rose to match the increased income. If this trend stabilizes, as seems to be the case, regardless of what the sizes of revenues are they will always be gulped by personal emoluments. The pertinent question here is, for how long can the higher levels of government continue to fund staff of local governments and for doing nothing? What this paper is advocating is less emphasis on local governments so that the funds expended on them may be made available for rural development. As things stand at present well over 80% of the funds accruing to local governments go for the payment of staff salaries and allowances. As long as this trend continues, the rural areas will remain undeveloped and local governments will remain meaningless and unviable.

Conclusion

So far we have argued that firstly, local government is inappropriate for the purpose of rural development. And secondly, that as much as local government and rural development are important aspects of government and deserve priority attention, rural development deserves first attention. We have postulated two reasons why rural development should be given first attention thus: resources available to government for its activities are in short supply and so it is unwise to pursue too many things at the same time. Therefore, if two related activities are competing for the same scarce resources, there is need for prioritization. This, we have dealt with at length above.

We will now turn attention to the point that developed rural areas are a sine qua non for meaningful and viable local governments. Put another way, developed rural areas are a prerequisite for meaningful and viable local governments and perhaps not the other way round which has tended to be the strategy of

Nigerian governments so far.

For a local government to be meaningful, it has to have reasonable autonomy to act on issues within its jurisdiction. Such autonomy comes with financial viability and not complete dependence on a higher tier of government for funding as is rapidly becoming the case with our local governments. One way to ensure financial independence is to have developed rural areas which will be in a position to pay in order to sustain local governments. If by the time emphasis is paid on local governments there already exist rural areas with amenities such as good roads, potable water, electricity, educational as well as health and agricultural services, such services attract user fees which will be viable financial resources for local governments. With all these amenities available, local governments can be charged with collection of taxes on them e.g. tolls on the roads and bridges, water and electricity rates, school fees, clinic and hospital fees and agricultural service fees; and also be charged with their maintenance for which it may also be grant-aided by higher levels of government.

Not only does a local government become more financially independent through collection of user fees, the availability in rural areas of amenities and services discussed here ensures greater economic well-being of the rural populace and increases their ability to pay other forms of taxes e.g. poll tax and development levies.

Once such basic amenities and services are already in place in rural areas, it becomes easier for local governments to attract staff with better and varied skills into their services thus ensuring better performance

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of functions. In cases where it is necessary to use contractors to prosecute jobs, it will be easier to secure the services of reputable contractors because the rural areas where they will be invited to work in would have become more accessible and more comfortable to live and work in.

Recommendations

The findings from this study have revealed that local government and rural development are two different and essential activities of modern day governments. And for ease and economy of execution of projects, it is more advantageous for rural development to be undertaken by a higher level of government and to precede local governments. In this wise, this study suggest that resources are scarce and have to be optimally utilized. For now, it is not wise to spread these resources thinly between local governments (which as we have seen above are spending the resources mainly on the payment of under-utilized staff) and rural development. Therefore, the billions of naira being spent on local governments now should be spent by the federal and state governments on rural development so as to ensure a sound basis for viable local governments in future. Such future local governments would be involved mainly in maintenance more so than construction of infrastructures and in secondary rather than basic or primary services. By secondary services it means, those that are not life and death services, e.g. establishment of recreation centers, parks, gardens, zoos, sports stadia, drains, and improvements and increase in size and number of existing facilities and services, as the needs arise.

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