



**State,  
Governance  
And Regional  
Integration  
In Africa**

**Editors:**

**Aloysius-Michaels Okolie  
Hassan Saliu  
Gerald Ezirim**

Published by the Nigerian Political Science Association, July 2019

## Local Governance and Sustainable Grassroots Development in Nigeria

**Tolu Lawal**

Department of Public Administration  
Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria

### **Abstract**

*Good governance is fundamental to the sustainable development of the grassroots in Nigeria. This is based on the fact that reasonable number of the country's population lives in rural areas, where most of the agricultural produce especially food items and other cash crops also come from and most of the votes are drawn from same place. With these critical roles in both economic and political spheres, it is expected that the people at the grassroots unavoidably experience meaningful infrastructural provisions and sustainable development in their various communities. But unfortunately, the quality of lives of rural residents has stagnantly remained poor as water, electricity, roads and health infrastructures are conspicuously absent. It is on this basis that the paper examined the challenges of governance and development in rural communities. The paper relied on secondary data to source its information. The paper concluded that corruption and indiscipline, inefficiency, lack of transparency and accountability, constitutional and autonomy problem and lack of maintenance culture were responsible for this ugly phenomenon. The findings suggested regular and periodic maintenance of infrastructures, good and effective governance, autonomy, effective service delivery and genuine punishment for corruption as antidote to sustainable grassroots development.*

**Keywords:** Corruption, Development, Grassroots, Governance, Local Government.

### **Introduction**

The development of the grassroots is essentially dependent on the state of governance; as good governance remains a critical element in development process. The kind of governance obtainable in a particular society determines the progress of such society. In Nigeria, good governance is fundamental to the sustainable development of the rural communities. This stems from the fact that reasonable number of the country's population lives in rural areas, where most of the agricultural produce, especially food items and other cash crops also come from, aside this, some mineral resources that constitute the basis of revenue generation for the country are also found in this locality. Politically, most of the votes that determine the leadership positions in the country are drawn from same place. With these critical roles in both economic and political spheres, it is expected that the people at the grassroots unavoidably experience meaningful sustainable development in their various communities through effective provision of infrastructural facilities.

Regrettably, the quality of lives of rural residents has stagnantly remained poor as a result of the dearth of necessary social facilities. This position was further emphasized by Adedeji (2000) when he averred;

The institutions of local government in Nigeria have been consistent over the years in their failure to enhance their capacity to engage and mobilize the people and to respond to their needs, and to administer effectively and responsibly the various local services. The most fundamental weakness of local governance in Nigeria is non-delivery, lack of accountability and corruption. Not surprisingly, therefore, local governments have failed woefully in providing good governance.

The above quotation clearly demonstrates the unpalatable situation at the grassroots. Good governance is rapidly eluding the rural communities as water, electricity, roads, health and other infrastructures are conspicuously absent. This ugly trend makes this paper inevitable. This paper is divided into six sections, section I is the introduction capturing the objectives of the study and conceptual analysis. Section II discusses the theoretical framework, while section III looks at local governance in Nigeria. Section IV analyses the nexus between local governance and sustainable grassroots development in Nigeria. Section V discusses the challenges of local governance in Nigeria and the way forward, while section VI concludes.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The major objective of this paper is to examine critically, local governance in Nigeria and its impact on rural/community development, and to demonstrate the nexus between local governance and grassroots development. The paper will also identify the challenges of local governance in Nigeria and make recommendations capable of enhancing good governance at local level that will invariably and eventually translate to sustainable development.

### **Conceptual Analysis**

Some concepts that are critical and basic to this study are analyzed for the purpose of intellectual validity and clarity of discussion.

### **Local Government**

Local government is defined as government, by popularly elected bodies, charged with the administration and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place (Appadorai, 1975). Agagu (1997) sees the local government as a government at the grassroots level of administration meant for meeting peculiar needs of the people. Flowing from the foregoing, local government should be a level of government which is supposed to have its greatest impact on the people of the grassroots. According to Odo (2014) local government is defined as an institution established to deliver public services according to local situations through the participation of the people and to ensure maximum efficiency in the

administration and provision of such public services to guarantee grassroots development.

### **Local Governance**

The meaning of local governance should begin with the understanding of governance as a concept. What is governance? Governance can be generically viewed as the process of making and implementing decisions (Isa, 2015). Governance is a process by which authority and power are exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. It is the legitimacy and competence of governments to formulate appropriate policies, make timely decision; implement them effectively and deliver services (Adeyemi, 2010 cited in Isa, 2015). Based on the foregoing, good governance is therefore, associated with accountability, transparency, efficiency, legitimacy and responsiveness. Having conceptualized governance, what then is local governance? Local governance can be defined as a veritable instrument most strategically placed for stimulating grassroots development and bringing about rural transformation (Eminue, 199, cited in Ibok, 2014). Local governance posses the capacity to enhance efficient service delivery at the grassroots and make local development possible. It embraces accountability and transparency in rural services.

### **Grassroots Development**

Grassroots development cannot be explained without the adequate understanding of the word, development. Development is multidimensional in nature, it involves socio-economic, cultural and political issues. Development connotes improvement in material well being of all citizens, not the most powerful and rich alone, but everybody in the society (Gboyega, 2003). It demands that poverty and inequity of access to the good things of life be removed or drastically reduced, it seeks to improve personal physical security and livelihoods and expansion of life chances.

Odo (2014) viewed grassroots development as a self-generating process of socio-economic and political development in which the rural inhabitants are actively involved, in development process and benefit from such arrangement. Odo identifies poverty reduction; rising incomes; increase in health and nutrition status; qualitative education, functioning infrastructural facilities etc as basic elements of grassroots development. Generally, grassroots development is an arrangement or a process whereby, the lives of the rural dwellers is tremendously and qualitatively improved or enhanced. It is the constitutional responsibility of the local government to ensure local governance so as to assure the rural people effective and sustainable grassroots development.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is focused on local governance and grassroots development, it therefore becomes imperative to adopt New Public Management (NPM) theory and bottom-up approach to development as theoretical models for the study.

The New Public Management (NPM) is the transition from process and procedure to an arrangement that is workable, practicable and result oriented. The theory places emphasis on good governance as a result of the recent globalization of the economy, technological innovation and decentralization. It is one of the most striking international trends in public management (Hood, 1991, 1998, 2000; Hood and Lodge, 2004). Shand (1995) described new public management as a good managerial approach, contending that a good managerial approach is result oriented. NPM is intended to improve the quality of public services, save public expenditure, improve the efficiency of governmental operations and make policy implementation more effective (Pollit and Boukaert, 2000). The theory is concerned primarily with how to deliver public goods efficiently and equitably.

New public management theory comes up with different concepts for performance and principles to achieve it. Hood (1991) identified the principles as accountability and efficiency; reduction of public sector expenditure; improvement in resource use through labour discipline; flexibility in decision making; competition in the public sector through decentralization and emphasis on result and not procedure. Essentially, NPM theory centres on accountability, transparency, democratization and citizens' participation these and other factors constitute good governance. This theory is relevant to this study because the theory was an effort to improve government service delivery to citizenry as a result of the expectations of the people particularly at the grassroots. Local government are basic to grassroots development. It is therefore expected that such basic need be provided to the rural communities for the enhancement of qualitative life and sustainable development. In many developing countries, NPM becomes an avenue through which democratic governance will transform into better governance that will lead to public policies that are technically efficient and effective and also responsive to the needs of large sections of the citizenry. The interplay of accountability, transparency, effectiveness, efficiency, decentralization and citizens' participation will enhance sustainable grassroots development. However, NPM as a theory that encourages government to concentrate on the efficient production of quality services to the citizenry neglects the political aspect of public administration. According to Armstrong (1998) most areas of public service and administration have distinct political, ethnical, constitutional and social dimensions and these factors make public sector different from other sectors. The NPM theory fails to analyze and put into appropriate context the role and influence of socio-political factors in the conceptualization and implementation of policies in the public sector. Despite this weakness, the new managerialism (New Public Management) offers greater transparency, efficiency, effective service delivery and good result, which makes the theory relevant and appropriate for use in this paper.

The bottom up approach to development was also adopted to fill the existing gaps created by the New Public Management theory and to serve as source of strength to the paper. The bottom up approach allows the interplay of various factors such as negotiation, bargaining, participation and other socio-political factors in the development process, which were lacking in the New Public Management. The bottom-up approach became popular as a result of the failure of top-down approach to

recognize the potentials and needs of local and rural residents in the development of their areas (Gurria, 2015). Centralized development decision making often involving city based experts, is generally too detached from local contextual realities. It is frequently encumbered by a planning arrogance, where technocrats think they know best what is in the interests of the people at the grassroots level (Painwell, 2008). The bottom-up approach means that local actors participate in decision making about the strategy and in the selection of the priorities to be pursued in their local area (Larrison, 1999; Niboh, 2008; Bon, 2013). It is a significant process of taking development to the grassroots. A collective process whereby a local community can take charge of the future of its own area. An approach that allows the local community and local players to express their views, expectations and plans. The involvement of local actors, the population at large, economic and social interest groups and representatives of public and private institutions. As a rural service delivery paradigm, bottom-up approach also encourages transparency. The mobilization and consultation strategies involved in the process paves way for consensus through dialogue and negotiation among participatory actors (Merchant, 2014; Gurria, 2015). Participation is encouraged at every stage; during the definition phase, during implementation, evaluation and the revision of the programme either directly or through those bodies representing collective interests, professional organization, and women group.

This approach places premium on effective service delivery from the bottom (rural segment). The genuine involvement of rural residents in development process will pave way for appropriate, sustainable and qualitative grassroots development in Nigeria.

### **Local Governance and Sustainable Grassroots Development: Analysis of the Nexus**

Local governance and sustainable grassroots development are symbiotic in nature. The presence of local governance ensures and assures sustainable grassroots development and vice versa. Since local governance has been perceived as a veritable instrument strategically placed for stimulating grassroots development, it is logically expected that meaningful grassroots development be provided with the aid of local governance.

According to Ola (1984) cited in Abutudu (2011) local government is created to bring about democracy and to afford opportunities for political participation to the citizen. It is also to provide efficient services and serve as a tool for the promotion of national consciousness, national integration, nation building and national unity.

Flowing from the foregoing, the functions of local government as mentioned constitute what can aptly be described as local governance. This is so, because democratic participation includes participation, mobilization, accountability and responsiveness. While an efficient service emphasizes efficiency and effectiveness, the developmental school preaches nation building. These factors can be analytically described as tenets of good governance or local governance. Local government is therefore governance at the grassroots expected to play a vital role in effective service

delivery to enhance sustainable grassroots development. Local governance is essential for creating an enabling environment for sustainable grassroots development, wherever local governance prevails, the local government responds to popular demand. Local government is therefore, put in a position to mobilize the people to participate effectively in the implementation of government's developmental programmes.

### **Local Governance in Nigeria**

The inability of the central government (Federal) to effectively and efficiently administer and govern successively, the nation at large necessitates the need for decentralization. This aptly informed the devolution of power, which consequently led to the creation of local government in Nigeria as the third tier of government and the government at the grassroots level. Local government is essentially designed to propel local governance and catalyse development at the local or grassroots level.

In realization of the aforementioned governments at Federal, State and Local have introduced and implemented various policies, programmes and reforms. But despite this, local governance has proved unattainable in Nigeria as most rural areas remained poor in terms of social and essential services delivery.

Enemu and Tomori (2000) observed that the country has experimented with diverse models of decentralization or forms of formal local governance, yet, the performance of the system has remained unimpressive. According to them, the councils have neither been able to address, significantly, the basic needs of the people nor have they effectively performed their other expected traditional roles. In similar vein, Akinola (2000) noted that poverty remains one of the most pressing social issues in rural governance in contemporary Nigeria. He believes that the inadequacy of governance in the rural sector had led the rural populace to loose hope in local government system.

It is evident that local governance is poor and weak in Nigeria as performance of local governments has been largely below expectation. The contribution of the council to grassroots development has been minimal despite all attempted commitments to ensure that good governance is ensured at the local level. To ascertain this fact, in the contemporary Nigeria, most communities, particularly, the rural and semi-rural are still battling with the dearth of basic and infrastructural facilities (Lawal, 2014). Most of the rural areas in Nigeria are in a pathetic state of infrastructure delivery, even, some of the urban local government areas are also deficient in service delivery. Some of these basic faculties where available, are left uncared for. The implication of this is that local governments in Nigeria have been consistent over the years in their failure to enhance their capacity to engage and mobilize the people and to respond to their needs and to administer effectively and responsibly the various local services needed for grassroots development. Local roads are left unrepaired, rural electricity are in state of dilemma, rural health centres are dilapidated, with absence of drugs and necessary health personnel, rural boreholes and water pumps have no water, rural water scheme/projects are deserted. The only

visible things in the rural areas are the signposts that show the location, direction and physical status of these infrastructures.

As a matter of fact, the foregoing analysis captures adequately the ugly situation of local government system in Nigeria. Apparently, it describes and demonstrates bad local governance and its consequences on sustainable grassroots development. At this juncture, one is forced to ask these pertinent questions; why has local governance been bad in Nigeria? What has happened to the resources and revenue accruable to local governments?. These questions automatically lead us to the next section of this paper.

### **Challenges of Local Governance in Nigeria**

Notably, local governance is the fulcrum of grassroots development anywhere in the world. But unfortunately, local governance has been constrained in Nigeria, thereby making sustainable grassroots development impossibility. The reasons for this ugly and unpalatable situation are not farfetched. These are analyzed below:

One is the high level of corruption in the local government system. Corruption at this level manifests in different perspectives. Official positions that are tactically designed to propel service delivery are used by most Nigerians as avenue for self enrichment and personal aggrandizement. To ensure this, funds allocated for developmental purposes are diverted to private and personal use. Contracts are inflated and given to cronies, documents are forged to perpetrate illegal transaction. These unethical action has made it difficult for councils to effectively deliver basic services to the rural people and consequently jeopardize governance at the local level.

Two, is the absence of maintenance culture: most of the facilities provided by the local government are not regularly maintained. Public institutions are geared towards constructing new projects with whatever resources available rather than maintaining existing ones. Politicians prefer new projects that they could be identified with to the existing projects executed by different political office holder or political party. This is done to score cheap political goal for the purpose of relevance in the next election exercise. Of importance is the state of disrepair of these projects, as most projects appear physically on ground without functioning. Such projects cannot be sustained for human development. For local governance to thrive, all projects must be adequately and qualitatively maintained and people, particularly, the local people must feel the impact of such projects.

Three, is the lack of community involvement in project design and implementation. According to Odo (2012) development is about people and if it is to be meaningful, the people must be its active agent and not just passive beneficiaries. Rural people are not usually consulted and carried along in the design and implementation of projects meant for them. This occurrence usually discourages the people from viewing the projects as theirs, instead, they view the projects as government projects, which will invariably lack community ownership and such projects remain unprotected and vulnerable.



Four, is the financial incapacity: The revenue base of local government is too poor to galvanize governance at the local level. In Nigeria, the 'juicy' revenue bases have been constitutionally given to the federal and state government. Today, most local governments are not financially viable as they rely on monthly allocation from the federal government, which has drastically reduced in the recent time due to the sharp fall in oil price at the international market. Also, the little amount given to local government is mostly spent on recurrent expenditures as it appears inadequate to execute capital projects. This has adversely affected the effective performance of local governments in service delivery and consequently hampers local governance and grassroots development.

Five, is the problem of autonomy. Local government is described as the third tier of government in Nigeria. This indicates that the power of local government is directly derived from the constitution. But sadly, the excessive control of local governments by the higher governmental authorities has made local government an extension or mere administrative unity of the higher governments thereby endangering local governance and grassroots development. It has become so difficult if not impossible for local government to initiate development programme without directive from the state. Local government is in the best position to understand the needs and aspirations of local people because it is closer to them. Therefore, it should be given the opportunity to assess and attend to the needs of the rural people without necessarily being directed or controlled.

Other challenges are lack of skilled professional workers such as; engineers, medical personnel's, architects e.t.c misplacement of priorities; frequent changes in political leadership; absence of democracy in some of the local councils and absence of accountability and transparency.

### **The Way forward**

Since local government has been acclaimed to be the government at the grassroots designed to meet the peculiar needs of the local people, it then becomes imperative to suggest ways by which this level of government could effectively discharge its responsibilities and act as genuine agent of sustainable grassroots development.

Importantly, corruption must be severely tackled at the local government level. Officers found guilty of corruption should be punished to serve as deterrent to others. Corruption has continued to flourish unabated in Nigeria because of lack of deterrence. The war on corruption in Nigeria is targeted at political enemies. It is high time we fought corruption genuinely. People are encouraged to steal government money because of the belief that those who stole yesterday/yesteryears were not condemned or crucified but rather embellished and celebrated. The Anti-corruption Agencies (EFCC and ICPC) should be alive to their responsibilities. Cases and investigations should be carried out without fair or favour. All parties and individuals involved in corruption must be treated equally. Judiciary must also be strengthened to enable it dispense justice without undue influence from any quarter, local governance

can only be possible where and when corruption does not impact on people's behaviour.

In addition, government must learn to maintain infrastructural facilities on regular basis to ensure their sustainability. It is only when facilities function that their impact can be felt. It is cheaper to maintain infrastructures than to embark on new ones. Local governance will be enhanced when social infrastructures are available and effectively functioning.

Also, rural people should be made to participate in project design and implementation. They need to be consulted and assessed before project can be initiated for them. This is important in order to actually know what the people want at any material time. Put differently, the needs of the people must be prioritized. The involvement and participation of people in projects allows for sustainability as such projects will be regularly protected and jealously guarded by the people themselves.

Another crucial area to be considered is finance. There must be a very strong financial base for the local government to enable it fulfil its development objectives. Local government should look beyond monthly allocation from the federal government. Councils can engage in profitable ventures that can increase the revenue base of local government. e.g transport, agriculture e.t.c Also, collection of rates should be improved and strictly monitored as these will serve as veritable sources of Internally Generated Revenue and consequently reduce over dependence of local government on higher governments for financial assistance.

The local government should be given meaningful freedom to determine the developmental programmes suitable for their people to enable them feel the impact of local governance.

The highly skilled professional workers should be encouraged to work in local government system. Motivation policy can be designed to make these professional workers feel fulfilled in their professional carrier. Also, of importance is the enthronement of democratic regimes in all the local governments across the country. The idea of appointing caretaker committee by the governor to oversee local government affairs for years should be discarded. Democracy enhances good governance.

### **Conclusion**

The paper has been able to discuss extensively local governance and sustainable grassroots development with reference to Nigeria. It has been observed that local governance serves as veritable instrument for grassroots development. Fundamentally local governance is constrained as a result of the unpalatable actions and inactions of the operators of governmental apparatus in Nigeria. The paper posited that a clear departure from these actions and inactions will definitely move local government to an enviable height and enhance local governance for grassroots development.

## References

- Abutudu, M. (2011). The Challenges and Opportunities for Improving the Local Government System in Nigeria. Paper presented at the Third Biennial National Conference on Community Development in Nigeria held at Grand Hotel, Asaba, November, 20-24.
- Adedeji, A. (2000). Renewal of the Search for Systems of Local Governance that can serve the Common Good. In Adedeji, A. & Bamidele, A. (Eds). *People-Centred Democracy in Nigeria? The search for Alternative Systems for Governance at the Grassroots*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books. (Nigeria) Plc.
- Akinola, S. (2000). Balancing the Equation of Governance at the Grassroots. In Adedeji, A. & Bamidele, A. (Eds). *People-Centred Democracy in Nigeria? The search for Alternative Systems of Governance at the Grassroots*. Ibadan Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Plc.
- Agagu, A. (1997). Local Government. In Kolawole, D. (Ed). *Readings in Political Science*. Ibadan: Dekaal Publisher.
- Appadorai, A. (1975). *The Substance of Politics*. New Dehil: Oxford University Press.
- Armstrong, A. (1998). A Comparative Analysis: New Public Management-the way Ahead. *Australia Journal of Public Administration*, 57,12-24.
- Eminue, O. (1999). UNDPs Nigeria 4th Country Programme 1992-1996, Conceptual and Methodological Consideration. *South-South Journal of Culture and Development*, 1,20.
- Enemuo, C. & Tomori, S. (2000). Local Governance in Nigeria: Bridging the Formal and Indigenous Structures. In Adedeji, A. & Bamidele, A. (Eds). *People Centred Democracy in Nigeria? The Search for Alternative Systems of Governance at the Grassroots*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Plc.
- Gboyega, A. (2003). Democracy and Development: The Imperative of Local Governance. An Inaugural Lecture, 2003, University of Ibadan.
- Gurria, A. (2015). *New Rural Development Paradigm and the Inclusive Sustainable New Communities Model*. New York: United Nation Publication.
- Hood, C. & Lodge, M. (2004). Competency, Bureaucracy and Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis. *Governance*, 17, 313-333.
- Hood, C. (1998). *The Arts of the State: Culture, Rhetoric and Public Management*. Clarendon: Oxford.
- Hood, C. (1991). A Public Management for all Seasons. *Public Administration*, 69, 3-19.
- Hood, C. (2000). Paradoxes of Public Sector Managerialism: Old Public Management and Public Service Bargains. *International Public Management Journal*, 3, 1-22.
- Iboke, E. (2014). Local Governance and Service Delivery in Nigeria. *Carribean Journal of Science Technology*, 2, 536-541.
- Lawal, T. (2014). Local Government and Rural Infrastructural Delivery in Nigeria. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 4(4) 139-147.
- Odo, L.U. (2012). Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria: Re-thinking the Approach. *National Development Studies*, 5.
- Odo, L.U. (2014). Local Government and the Challenges of Grassroots Development in Nigeria. *Review of Public Administration and Management*, 3(6): 204-212.
- Pollit, C. & Bouckcart, G. (2000). *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis*. New York: University Press.