

ABSTRACT

The political necessity to extend the power and presence of Government throughout a political system is the primary justification for the establishment of local Government. In Nigeria, this compulsive need has inevitably led the Government to accept the principle of power sharing and distribution in the country's federal structure. The study investigated the autonomy of local Government in Nigeria with challenges they are facing and how they can overcome these challenges. Descriptive analysis was employed for this research and the following objectives were investigated: to assess the challenges facing the autonomy of local Government in Nigeria, to investigate the efforts of the Nigerian Government in ensuring successful autonomy of the local Governments and to inquire the levels of readiness of local Governments toward their autonomy from the federal Government.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Local Government administration in Nigeria has been in existence since 1972 and its primary function is to bring Government nearer to the people at the grassroots. Its inefficiency and ineffectiveness in addressing the primary needs and wants of the people at the grass root has made the third tiers of Government irrelevant in the administration of the country's lowest tiers of Government to the people. The local Government councils are expected to serve the people's interest in areas of road constructions, public markets, healthcare facilities, motor parks, building primary schools, potable waters and so on. This is because, local Administration is the concern of the grass root people in the provision of social and economic amenities to the rural area where they come from, making it Government at the grassroots.

Since the inception of the system of local Government in Nigeria, there had been persistent clamour for the autonomy of the local Government as the third tier of governance in the federation. It is important to note that the federal Government has over the years joined in ensuring that the local Government have its autonomy. In the forward of the guidelines for the 1979 local Government reforms, it was clearly stated that, the states have continued to encroach upon what would have been the exclusive preserve of local Governments. In order

to strengthen the autonomy and philosophy of Government at the local level, The Federal Government guaranteed the statutory nature of local Government by embodying it in the 1979 constitution. In section 7(1) of the constitution, it was stated that, "the system of democratically elected local Government councils is under this constitution guaranteed". Even the military administration of General Ibrahim Babangida from 1986 took bold steps to strengthen the autonomy of local Government. By January 1988, good measures of autonomy came the way local Government with the scrapping of the state ministries of local Government throughout the country thus removing the political control and bureaucratic red tapism perpetuated by these state ministries.

Local Government is widely acknowledged as a viable instrument for rural transformation and for delivery of social services to the people. It is strategically located to fulfill the above functions because of its physical and psychological distance between officials of the other tiers of Government responsiveness, and simplicity of operations.

However, despite the strategic importance of the local Government to the national development process, its contribution has been minimal. Some observers in the past attempted to provide reasons for the ineffectiveness of local Government in the development process. While others agree that the ineffectiveness of local Government derives primarily from excessive Government control. Admittedly, states have undermined the financial viability of local Government by diverting statutorily allocated grants for local Governments as well as encroaching on their revenue yielding functions like markets, Motor Parks, tenement rates, Liquor licensing.

Obviously, the current campaign by the National Union of Local Government Employees' (NULGE) and fears shown by teachers against the Local Government autonomy are result of behaviour and attitudes of the persons who operated the system, and treated local Governments as a super ordinate and subordinate tier of Government.

Be that as it may, the Local Government commission should be strengthened to coordinate, advise on periodic reviews of structural arrangements set standards that would determine policies on local Government training programmes.

More importantly, the state Governments' involvement in local Government affairs should be acknowledged and appropriate institutional arrangements made to regularize this

involvement. Based on this, a National local Government commission should be established among other things to coordinate the Inter-Governmental aspects of local Government affairs on a continuous and permanent basis. Today, the tendency to ignore the political factor in the Management of local Government had reduced local Government to instruments of regulation and control. Local Governments which ought to be seen as instrument of mobilization is usually not complex and generally does not really require sophisticated and highly qualified personnel for effective performance.

Lack of autonomy is a central problem of the Nigerian local Government system. There is a need for a local Government that is truly autonomous vis-à-vis state and federal Governments. The state Governments exploited the ambiguities in the provisions of the 1979 constitution and subsequent reviewed constitutions to suit their selfish desires. They neglected aspects of the 1976 local Government reforms that they were displeased with and distorted those that were merely convenient. For example, throughout the Second Republic, 1979-1983, no election was held into the local Government councils, only sole administrators and caretaker committees were appointed. This was at variance with the 1976 reforms and the 1979 constitution, which in section 7 provided for democratically elected local Government councils.

All in all, the nearness of local Governments to the people places them in a position where they can easily articulate and aggregate the demands of the people. A Government operating at the grassroots level is indeed, more likely to be attached to the needs of the people. Consequent upon this, the National Union of Local Government Employers' (NULGE) and the teacher's should pray and wait patiently for the outcome of this all important resolution(s) from the various House Assembly.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

One of the major defects of the pre-1976 local Government system in Nigeria was the whittling down of their powers by the state Governments that continued to encroach upon what would have normally been the exclusive preserve of local Governments. Others were lack of adequate funds, in-appropriate institutions, inadequate staffing arrangement and excessive politicking, which together made the emergence of a virile local Government impossible. There was also the problem of disconnect between the people and Government

at the local level. The 1976 Local Government Reforms was therefore, introduced to address these problems. Local Government, it was argued, must have defined and precise functions designed to promote the development of local Government areas; they must have assured finance to enable them plan their budget and carry out their functions; and they must have adequate staff. These were indications that the reforms sought to bring about the evolution of a local Government system capable of internally evolving policies among alternatives without extraneous control in the interest of its citizens. Therefore this study sought to investigate the autonomy of local Government in Nigeria with challenges they are facing and how they can overcome these challenges.

1.3 Research Questions

These are some of the questions the study is designed to answer:

- i) what are the challenges facing the autonomy of local Government in Nigeria?
- ii) what are the efforts of the Nigerian Government in ensuring successful autonomy of the local Governments?
- iii) what are the levels of readiness of local Governments toward their autonomy from the federal Government?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study was to find out the autonomy of local Government in Nigeria with the challenges they are facing and how they can overcome these challenges. The specific objectives were:

- i) to assess the challenges facing the autonomy of local Government in Nigeria
- ii) to investigate the efforts of the Nigerian Government in ensuring successful autonomy of the local Governments
- iii) to inquire the levels of readiness of local Governments toward their autonomy from the federal Government

1.5 Significance of the Study

The basis of local Government is inextricably woven around the principles of decentralization. The significance of this study was therefore to observe the autonomy of local Government in Nigeria with challenges they are facing and how they can overcome these challenges. Findings from this study will be useful for Government and the general public in the area

administration, centralization and decentralization. It will also be useful in academic studies particularly in the area of local Government studies in higher institutions.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study covered respondents like the Government officials, National Union of Local Government Employees' (NULGE) and other Government parastatals. The information derived from these respondents will be subjected to data analysis.

1.7 Limitation of the study

The only constraint encountered by the researcher was finance. This limited the researcher to print just one hundred and twenty questionnaires as against the proposed two hundred and fifty questionnaires. The researcher, however, came up with findings that would be worth making reference to in future and also contribute to the existing literature.

1.8 Definitions of Terms

The following terms were used in the course of this study:

Autonomy: the right or condition of self-Government, especially in a particular sphere.

Centralization: the concentration of control of an activity or organization under a single authority.

Decentralization: the transfer of authority from central to local Government.

Local Government: the administration of a particular town, county, or district, with representatives elected by those who live there.

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