

## Local Government and Rural Infrastructural Delivery in Nigeria

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### Abstract

In the contemporary world today, the need to decentralize administration to facilitate efficiency, effectiveness and good governance has become the rule rather than the exception. Both developed and developing countries ensure that services are delivered to the people at the grassroots. It is no doubt that these services are delivered via a structure put in place by these countries, which are given different names. In Nigeria, it is called local government. Larger percentage of people in Nigeria live in the rural areas, where most of the local foods are produced, and bulk of votes also reside. It is however unfortunate that larger percentage of local government in Nigeria lack basic rural infrastructure needed to engender development. It is against this background that this paper assessed the level of rural infrastructure at the grassroots level with a view to identify the problems militating infrastructural development. The paper relied on both primary and secondary data to source its data. The paper submitted that for genuine development to take place in the rural areas necessary infrastructure must be put in place.

**Key words:** *Local Government Infrastructure Development, Nigeria, Rural, Decentralization.*

### Introduction

Infrastructure development is at crucial stage in the world today. Countries of the world ensure the provision of infrastructure to improve the livelihoods of their citizen and their quality of life (Khoza, 2009). Infrastructure plays a key role in both socio-economic and political development and enrichment of living standards.

The shift from focus on construction of infrastructure to the delivery of infrastructure drew the attention of so many countries in Africa, particularly, Nigeria to focus on the provision and delivery of infrastructure, especially at the local level. This is because over two thirds of Nigeria's population resides in local areas, where poverty prevails (Udoh, 2005). According to Udoh, over 100 million Nigerians still lack access to electricity, and less than 40% of the population has access to safe drinking water. Infrastructure are mostly concentrated in

urban areas. Access to infrastructure such as; safe water supply, electricity and roads are necessary to reduce vulnerability and poverty in rural areas of Nigeria (Udoh, 2005).

However, the establishment of local government in Nigeria arises from the need to facilitate rural development through infrastructure development and delivery (Sehinde, 2008). Section 7(1) of 1999 constitution empowered local government to construct and maintain rural roads street lighting, water and drains and other public highways or such public facilities (FGN, 1999). The recognition and importance of local government in the development process is based on the imperative to tackle local socio-economic problems and to manage grassroots development through provision of this basic infrastructure (Wunsch, 2001, Anwar and Sana, 2006). Despite these provisions, lack of adequate, affordable and reliable infrastructure services still touches the life of rural Nigerian family everyday, water supply is neither safe nor adequate for their needs, local roads are impassable and the potentials for agricultural processing, small business development and rural employment is constrained by lack of electricity. Local government contributions to rural infrastructure have been minimal when compared to the amount of resources which accrue to it (Schinde, 2008) Local people have become disillusioned as a result of unfulfilled expectation (Ayee, 2003). In Nigeria today, the overriding impression today is that local governments are weak in responding to the challenges posed by rural infrastructural development. Given this submission, this paper therefore shall assess the level of infrastructure provision and delivery in the local government system in Nigeria, with specific focus on rural water supplies, roads and electricity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory of decentralization will be adopted in this paper. This is because development itself needs to be decentralized so as to achieve its purpose.

The theory of decentralization explains the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to subordinate or quasi-independent government organisations and or the private sector (Roindinelli, 1981, Heywood 1997, Bonal, n.d). It is concerned with how functions and responsibilities are given to different institutions from the central government for efficient and effective performance in terms of service delivery.

In the literature, two major forms of decentralization are discerned; namely, decentralization and devolution (Olowu, 1995). The former alludes to the transfer of state responsibilities and resources from the centre to the periphery within the same administrative system. It indicates an internal form of delegation of responsibilities. On the other hand, devolution entails the transfer of specified responsibilities and resources to community who are usually represented by their own lay or elected (i.e non appointed) officials. Adeyeye (2000) argued that in reality, devolution and decentralization are not mutually exclusive when implementing decentralization programmes, a balance of these elements is usually sought.

In the wake of widespread disenchantment with the centralized state structure, transfer of some power and resources from the central to local government and organizations has been advocated (Anifowose and Enemu, 1999).

For most African governments, however, decentralization is now viewed as a strategy for mobilizing local resources and initiative for national development. Since it has become evident that federal or state governments alone cannot guarantee development in the rural areas, it then becomes imperative for power, authority and responsibility to be transferred from the central or state government to the local government for the purpose of enhancing

development in the local areas. This is important because of the remoteness of the federal government to the rural people. It is believed that decentralization would make local governments more competent in the provision of rural infrastructure. Decentralization can be therefore viewed as an initiative to enhance rural development. It is encouraged by the need to improve service delivery to large populations and put in place meaningful structure to provide good governance at the local level. Local government in Nigeria is widely acknowledge as a viable instrument for rural development and for the delivery of social services to the rural people. It is believed that this level of government is strategically placed to fulfil the above functions because of its proximity to the rural people which enhances its ability to easily articulate and aggregate the demands of the people. The 1976 local government reform in particular was aimed at decentralizing some significant functions of the state government at local levels in order to harness local resources for refined development.

### **Local Government System in Nigeria**

Local government is a creation of British colonial rule in Nigeria. It has, over time, experienced change in name, structure and composition (Arowolo, 2010). Between 1930s and 1940s, local government was known as Chief-in-council and chief and council, where traditional rulers were given pride of place in the scheme of things. In the 1950s, election was introduced according to the British model in the western and eastern parts of the country with some measure of autonomy in personnel, financial and general administration (Nwabueze, 1982). It was on this premise that the rising tide of progress, growth and development experienced in the local governments in these areas was based. The pace of this development was more noticeable in the south than in the north. During this period, heterogeneity was the hallmark of the local government as there was no uniformity in the system and the level of development was also remarkably different. The introduction of 1976 reforms by the military administration of General Obasanjo brought about uniformity in the administrative structure of the system, the reforms introduced a multi-purpose single-tier local government system (Ajayi, 2000).

The reforms also introduced population criticism under which a local government could be created. Consequently, a population of within 150,000 to 300,000 was considered feasible for a local government (1976 Guidelines). This was done to avoid the creation of non-viable local council and for easy accessibility. There was provision for elective positions, having the Chairman as executive head of local government with supervisory councillors constituting the cabinet. This was complemented by the bureaucrats and professionals, who were charged with the responsibility of implementing policies.

In 1991, a major landmark reform was introduced as the system had legislative arm. In addition, the Babangida administration increased the number of local governments from 301 in 1976 to 453 in 1989 and 589 in 1991. The Abacha regime increased the number to 774 local councils that we presently have in Nigeria (Ajayi, 2000).

### **Infrastructural Provision and Local Government in Nigeria. An Overview**

Infrastructure is seen as umbrella term for many activities and basic structure and facilities necessary for a country to function efficiently. It is designed as the totality of basic physical facilities upon which all other economic activities in a system depend (African Development Bank, 1999, Geet, 2007). Infrastructure comprises the assets needed to provide people with access to economic and social facilities and services such as roads, water,

drainage, bridges, electricity e.t.c. Rural infrastructure is a broad term covering the basic facilities and services needed for rural communities and rural development (FAO, 2006).

Local government is a government at the grassroots level of administration meant for meeting the peculiar needs of the rural people (Agagu, 1997). In his analysis, he viewed local government as a level of government which is supposed to have its greatest impact on the people at the rural areas. It is a tier of government which in physically terms is closet to the citizenry and it is saddled with responsibility of guaranteeing the political, social and economic development of its area and its people (Enero, Dadoyin and Elumilade, 2004).

Appadorai (1975) observed that there are problems that are local in nature and such problems are better handled by local government because they are better understood by the local people themselves. Based on the 1976 guidelines for local government reform, it is expected that local government should engage in rural infrastructural provision to engender development and good governance at the grassroots.

But unfortunately local government still lacks behind in the area of infrastructure, this ugly trend is particularly greater in the area of water and sanitation, rural road access and electricity.

According to World Bank (2004) Nigeria's infrastructure in terms of quality and quantity is grossly inadequate and inferior to that existing in other parts of the world. Out of the 102 countries assessed in the global competitiveness report in 2004, the Nigeria's quality of infrastructure was ranked 3rd to the last, this is consistent with the World Bank survey results where manufacturing firms listed infrastructure as their most severe business constraint.

The Nigerian roads were described as the lowest in density in Africa, where only 31% of the roads are paved as compared to 50% in the middle income countries, and even where roads are provided, only 40% of these roads can be said to be in good condition (Alabi and Ocholi, 2010). Currently only 20% of Nigeria's rural population have access to electricity.

In Nigeria, Ipmbemi (2001) observed in Amuro district in Kogi State that passengers pay 3 times for kilometre on untarred rural roads compared to tarred roads. A nation-wide survey was conducted by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) on the state of roads in the country, the survey revealed that the road network, as at December 2002, was estimated at 194,000 kilometres, with the Federal Government being responsible for 17%, state government 16% and local government 67%. It was also shown that most of the roads were in bad condition, especially those in rural areas (CBN, 2002). Some of the roads constructed over 30 years ago had not been rehabilitated even once, resulting in major cracks and numerous potholes that make road unsafe.

Water is critical to human existence but yet a serious problem of human survival, health and economic development. Millions of people in developing countries are faced with acute water stress from inadequate supplies. Survey conducted by Hall (2006) revealed insufficient or lack of provision of pipe borne or portable drinking water where 50% of the city dwellers and 90% of rural dwellers lack access, as a result, large proportion of households have resorted to drawing water from unhygienic sources.

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 infrastructure delivery. Some of these infrastructure 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 sign posts that shows the location, direction, and physical status of these rural infrastructure. So many of them are not functioning due to long years of existence, lack of maintenance, uncompleted nature of the projects, vandalism, lack of quality job and absence of community ownership of such projects.

### **Challenges of infrastructural delivery in the local government system**

Infrastructural provision in the grassroots faces serious challenges. One of the obvious problem is the lack of maintenance culture. Local government is found of constructing new projects with the little fund given to them rather than taking good care of the existing ones. These new projects sometimes are used by the politician to boost their image and that of their political party to enable them get necessary support from their people. In another dimension, embarking on a new project makes diversion of public fund to private use easier than the maintenance of the existing one.

Also, financial crisis is another factor that impedes the capacity of local government to provide infrastructure. Many local governments lacked the required fund to provide and maintain infrastructure, for instance, 96% of their monthly allocation is expended on recurrent expenditure, leaving only 4% for capital expenditure.

Odoh (2004) argued that local government as instrument of rural infrastructure development has remained inactive over the years as a result of excessive control and various interferences exercised by the higher levels of governments. This arises from the fact that most of the funding for local governments come from federal transfer to the local governments. This has made local government heavily dependent on federal government funding which is not adequate to execute meaningful projects.

Agagu (2004) hinges the inability of local government to facilitate rural infrastructure on the incessant changes in policies and structures of local government in Nigeria, he argues that this situation is in contrast to what obtains in many developed countries such incessant changes no doubt constitute some problems to the operations and performance of this level as they subject the institution to perpetual learning of new rules with little or no opportunity to fully exploit, let alone improve upon existing rules. Instability and frequency of change in the area of leadership selection and types of management also affects local government ability to provide rural infrastructure.

Between 1976 and 1983, the civilian governors rather than allow elections to hold choose to appoint their party loyalists as committee members to manage the local government areas across the country. By 1984, the military government that took over resorted to the use of sole administrators chosen among the civil servants. Between 1987 and 1993, elections were used again to select the leaders at this level. By 1994, sole administrators were reintroduced. Even elections held into the local governments during General Sanni Abacha's era were based on subjective criteria where candidates who did not share the aspirations of General Abacha and his cohorts were disqualified from contesting elections. Since 1988, there have been over fifteen chairman or leaders manning each local government. This frequency of change in leadership also affects policies and programme implementation. More often than not, policies and projects of predecessors are abandoned as each new set of leaders want to award new contracts and start new projects rather than continue with previous ones.

Low level of people's participation in their own development constitute a big challenge to rural infrastructure delivery. From the colonial period of local government administration till date, much noise had been made about development from below, "Bottom up" approach to development, "popular participation" and other catch phrase to argue for people's involvement in their development. There have been more noise than action. Local governments prepare estimates and projects for their revenue and expenditure without proper recourse to and due consultation with the people for whom the exercise is being carried out to know their needs, problems and potentials (Sikiru, 2000).

Also, there are problems of corruption, poor management, misappropriation and misapplication of the funds accruable to local government that also affect infrastructure delivery at the grassroots. The local government is not free from corruption. Those who are in charge of fund meant for infrastructural provision tend to do away with substantial portions of the fund, thereby leaving the project uncompleted and abandoned.

### **Conclusion**

The recognition and importance of local government in the development process is prompted by the imperative to tackle local socio-economic problems and to manage grassroots development through provision of basic rural infrastructure. This paper has demonstrated the weakness of local government in responding to the challenges of rural infrastructure provision and delivery. The rural infrastructure network is unavailable in the local areas and where it is available, it is severely degraded and inadequate for any meaningful development. Based on this, the following suggestions are put forth to enhance to delivery capacity of local government and enable the rural people enjoy the presence of basic rural infrastructure.

One, local government fund should be increased. The present monthly allocation from federal government to local government is grossly inadequate. Some local governments use the money to settle only their recurrent expenditure, i.e pay salaries and allowances of staffs and political appointees. And not enough to embark on infrastructural provision.

Two, undue interference from higher governments e.g state and federal, should be minimized. Local governments should be allowed to design and implement policies that address the peculiar needs of their areas. The idea of imposition from state or federal should be discouraged. Although, they can be partners in progress, but such partnership must bring meaningful development.

Third, democracy and good governance should be fully instituted at the grassroots level. The government at the local government level should be elected officials and not stooges of state government appointed on the basis of political and social affiliation who will only project the interest of his "God father" and that of his own.

Fourth, is the encouragement of maintenance culture in Nigeria. There is need to promote culture of maintenance in Nigeria. Infrastructure needs to be maintained as this will prolong its durability and efficiency.

Fifth, corruption as a way of life in Nigeria must be deterred. It must be severely punished to serve as deterrence to others as this remain the only antidote to rural infrastructural problems in Nigeria.

Sixth, priority must be defined by the officials of the local government, every project should be able to add meaning to human development.

Seventh, is the involvement of the people in the formulation and implementation of policies and projects. People needs to be consulted to know their needs before projects are initiated for them. It is appropriate for the people to determine what they need as this

enhances their sense of belonging and claim of ownership of such projects. People's participation is one of the ingredients of good governance.

And lastly, is the improvement in the revenue generation capacity of local government. The council should look inward and explore every available opportunity to generate more revenue.

Rather than relying solely on federal allocation that is not enough to provide infrastructure, the council should look for ways of increasing their monthly revenue by engaging in ventures that can bring in more money at the end of the month.

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