

Towards Improving Local Government Administration on the Rural Poor in Nigeria: The Role of Women and Private Media

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Abstract

One of the basic objectives of establishing local governments in Nigeria is to bring about development and improvement in the standard of living of the people at the local level. Though many calls have been made on the issue of decentralization of authority at this level, the fact remains that most of the activities of this arm of government in their present semi-autonomous state are urban focused, thus increasing the concern on further marginalisation of poverty stricken rural communities. This study, therefore, examined the role of women and private media in the design, execution, monitoring and evaluation of local government projects/development programmes in Oke-Ogun area of Oyo State, Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling was used: this involved dividing Oyo State into regions where Ifedapo representing Oke-Ogun was purposively selected. Using a threshold population of less than 20,000 rural areas in the region were identified and ten communities were randomly selected from the marginalised communities in terms of social and economic development using interview guide and direct observation. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The result of the study indicated that most of the empowerment programmes and development projects of the government eluded the selected communities due to political interference. The rural communities were also not privileged to have access to information about most of the projects and the activities of the private media were not extended to these communities in this regard. The study therefore concluded that participatory

local governance be given priority. It was recommended that the rural women and the private media should collaborate and be involved in the design, execution, monitoring and evaluation of local government projects and development activities.

Keywords: Rural poverty, marginalisation, women, private media, empowerment

Introduction

The rising level of poverty in Nigeria has shown clearly that government administration is still struggling to deliver some aspects of good governance, mostly as felt at the grass roots level. Available statistics on the incidence of poverty in Nigeria have shown that, while urban poverty rate increased progressively from 3 percent in 1980 to 25.2 percent in 1996, that of rural areas increased from 6.5 percent in 1980 to 31.6 percent in 1996 (Oyeranti & Olayiwola, 2005). This is corroborated by Presidential Report (1999) that the nature of poverty in Nigeria is overwhelmingly a rural problem. The rural populations which constitute about 73% of the country's population are backward and underdeveloped.

Decentralization of power to bring development to the grass roots level, with a view to reducing poverty was the fundamental reason for creating local governments in Nigeria. Local government administration has come of age, not so much because of its efficiency and effectiveness, but primarily because of its longevity, and resilience of its relevance in the administration of the country (Akhakpe *et al*, 2012).

As a measure of improving local governance, participatory approach to local governance is resurfacing recently in the literature. In line with this thought, this study sets out to examine how rural women can be empowered through private media in the design, execution, monitoring and evaluation of local government projects and development programmes in Oke-Ogun area of Oyo State, Nigeria. The study focuses on Oke-Ogun rural settlements in Oyo state. Oke-Ogun lies between latitude 6⁰ and 8⁰ degrees north of the equator and between 3⁰ and 4⁰ east of Greenwich meridian. Oke-Ogun area consists of ten local governments namely: Oorelope, Irepo, Olorunsogo, Saki East and West, Itesiwaju, Atisbo, Iwajowa, Kajola and Iseyin.

The role of infrastructural facilities in grassroots development and poverty reduction cannot be over-emphasized whether in the urban or rural environments, due to their tendency to reduce the costs of production; which affects profitability, levels of output and employment. (McNeil, 1993; Akinola, 2007). Rural infrastructure in Nigeria has long been neglected. Investments in health, education and water supply have been focused largely on the cities. As a result, the rural population has extremely limited access to services such as schools and health centres, and about half of the population lacks access to safe drinking water (IFAD, 2012).

In Oke-ogun area of Oyo State, there is marginalisation in the provision of infrastructural facilities by the local government even within the rural settlements. For instance, in Ifedapo Local Government Area where twenty-five settlements were identified by national inventory of community based infrastructure, only three were found with significant proportion of rural facilities such as potable water, health and educational facilities, cottage industries and hotels (Owoola, 2002).

Focusing on equitable allocation of resources to rural areas for their development vis-a-vis their urban counterparts can, therefore, not be underscored owing to the facts that sustenance of the country, especially, cities is largely dependent on the resource base of these regions (Jibowu, 1992; IFAD, 2012). Recent development debates have identified rural women empowerment as key to reducing rural poverty not only because they are the worse hit by poverty or their disadvantaged social status as against men, but also because of the major role they play in the production process of rural economy. Since this is characteristic of Ifedapo local government's rural communities, the quest to embark on this study is further re-emphasized.

Conceptual Clarifications

Local Government Administration

For better understanding of the phrase "Local Government Administration" it is pertinent to perceive the meaning of local government and administration independently and then provide a link between the two. The term 'local government' has no unanimous definition among different scholars. Appadorai (1975) defines local government as government by the popularly elected bodies charged with administration

and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place. Lawal (2000) extends it to be a tier of government closest to the people and which is vested with certain powers to exercise control over the affairs of people in its domain. Some common elements in the above definitions also feature in the definition given by the United Nations Office for Public Administration, that is “a political subdivision of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such an entity is elected or otherwise locally selected”. Local government council is thus, a government at the grassroots level of administration meant for meeting the peculiar grassroots needs of the people (Samihah & Salihu, 2011). In view of this, local government concept has been perceived as a multi-dimensional one: social, economic, political, geographic, legal and administrative (Adeyemi, 2012).

The word ‘administration’ which features prominently in the concept of local government also has many definitions but within this context, and especially as the two connect, shall be construed as the activities concerned with the management of government business and the study of these activities (Adamolekun, 1983).

Poverty

According to Oyeranti & Olayiwola (2005), poverty the conceptualisation of which came in the 1990s, has three dominant views in the literature. The first view sees poverty as a deprivation of some basic human needs at the individual or household level. The second view defines poverty as the failure to achieve basic capabilities such as being adequately nourished, living a healthy life, possession of skills to participate in economic and social life, permission to take part in community activities to mention a few (Sen, 1999). The core of the third view of poverty is that poverty must be defined by the poor themselves or by the communities that poor people live in (Oyeranti & Olayiwola, 2005). The World Development Report (World Bank, 2000) extends the concept of poverty beyond income and consumption plus education and health, to include risk and vulnerability, as well as intimidation and powerlessness. Though poverty, whether in urban or rural area encompasses some or all of the components described above, the exclusion of opportunities from the rural areas, as in

the case of Ifedapo rural communities, further worsens their state of poverty.

Marginalisation

The term “marginalisation” generally describes the overt actions or tendencies of human societies whereby those perceived as being without desirability or function are removed or excluded from the prevalent systems of protection and integration, thereby limiting their opportunities and means for survival. It has aspects in sociological, economic, and political debates. It is a form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities (UNESCO, 2010). The limited access to social services and basic infrastructure has continued to place the rural populace in Nigeria at a disadvantage in terms of manpower development, thus limiting their chances of economic growth as against their urban counterparts. Since corruption has bedeviled the administration of the local government which serves as the feasible hope of bridging this gap, finding a means of bridging social inequality is inevitable.

Participatory Concept

Participation means the active involvement of communities in needs assessment, determination of priorities, planning and execution of projects. It also refers to the contribution of potential beneficiaries to the realisation of a project for their own development (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). In order to bridge the gap between the local government authorities and the local communities, there is the need for incorporation of the local knowledge into the projects’ decision making process (Nwachukwu and Ezeh 2007).

Empowerment

Empowerment is fundamentally about power – about the power to redefine our possibilities and options and to act on them, the power within that enables people to have the courage to do things they never thought themselves to be capable of, and the power that comes from working alongside others to claim what is rightfully theirs (Rosalind *et al*, 2008). Such power as contained in the definition implies that it can be a lone or concerted effort aimed at reducing social inequality. Empowering women has become a frequently cited goal of development interventions and about

four aspects of it are generally reflected in the literature: to be empowered one must have been disempowered, empowerment cannot be bestowed by a third party, its definitions usually include a sense of people making decisions on matters which are important in their lives and being able to carry them out and that empowerment is an on-going process and not a product (Mosedale, 2005).

Private Media

A medium is a 'channel of communication' - a means through which people send and receive information (Sociology Center, 2011). Private media implies ownership of information and communication outlet outside the state control, that is run by individuals and companies for profit.

Traditional media: radio, television, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, tax press and other print publications.

Social media: new generation of digital, computerized, or networked information and communication technologies.

Local Governments' Administration and Community-based Development Projects in Nigeria

The structure of government, coupled with the disparity in population distribution in a federal system like Nigeria will continue to make local governments as a tier of government relevant in grassroots development. The reasons for this are not far-fetched: decentralization is a key strategy for promoting good governance, interpreted as greater pluralism, accountability, transparency, citizen participation and development (Okojie, 2009). Quoting Asante & Aye (2008), Okojie stressed further that since decentralisation transfers decision-making powers from the center to local institutions; it provides an opportunity for local involvement in the decision-making process and harnessing local knowledge, resources and expertise in the development process.

The causes of poor local governments' administration with respect to provision of rural infrastructure in Nigeria can be discussed under three major factors: inadequate funding, poor structure and corruption. The problem of inadequate funding of local governments for service provision to the rural communities was peculiar to the discriminatory colonial era (township ordinance) and post-independence periods of national

development plans (Olayiwola & Adeleye, 2005; Akpan, 2012). While (IHDR, 2001) considers the problems of local elite capture and governance issues (accountability) as affecting the efficiency of local governments, Hume & Ola (n.d); Onwuenmenyi, 2008 and Arowolo, 2006 describe corruption, stemming from the national level, as a major cause of the comatose state of local government administration and a major hindrance to good governance. Wide-scale embezzlement by officials of the grassroots has made the needed development of grassroots a tall dream and has rendered them financially incapable to discharge their constitutionally assigned responsibility. Funds earmarked for social and economic services at the local government level for rural communities are often diverted into private pockets (Okojie, 2009). Table 1 shows how the rural communities in each geographic zone in Nigeria have fared in terms of access to some basic infrastructural facilities.

Table 1: Rural access to water, sanitation, health and communication facilities (% of population with access)

Facility	National	North-East Zone	North-West Zone	North-Central Zone	South-East Zone	South-West Zone	South-South Zone
Access to Water (All Sources)	80.9	88.5	93.5	81.0	64.4	94.3	79.2
Access to Safe Water	40.0	30.7	50.6	48.9	40.8	73.5	45.9
Access to Water (All Year Round)	42.9	37.7	38.6	31.5	54.3	42.6	56.7
Access to Treated Water	9.7	4.6	7.5	14.1	11.4	20.4	5.8
Safe Sanitation	47.6	45.4	61.6	46.6	69.5	62.1	55.0
Improved Waste Disposal	4.6	6.2	10.7	8.8	9.0	36.0	13.2
Cell phone Ownership	15.2	8.8	12.5	21.9	32.9	40.0	34.3
Access to Health Facilities	47.8	48.4	55.3	61.1	37.1	73.1	45.9
Satisfaction with Access to Health Facilities	62.7	62.6	62.6	67.9	64.9	81.6	57.9

Source: National Bureau of Statistics 2006a: Core Welfare Indicator Questionnaire (CWIQ) Survey. Adapted from Okojie (2009)

Owoola (2002) observes marginalisation in the provision of infrastructural facilities within the rural settlements by the local governments in Nigeria. Most of the infrastructural development in the

rural communities has been through collective community development (Akinola, 2007). Other studies have generally supported the conclusion that there is discriminatory access to services by rural dwellers (Okojie, 2009).

Oke-Ogun Experience

A few of the works reviewed have shown that the experience of rural communities in Oke-Ogun with respect to benefiting from local governments' administration is not so different from that of other marginalised rural communities in other parts of the country. For instance, in Ifedapo Local Government where twenty-five settlements were identified by national inventory of community based infrastructure, only three were found with a significant proportion of rural facilities such as potable water, health and educational facilities, cottage industries and hotels (Owoola, 2002). In a few cases where these facilities were provided, the maintenance was left in the hands of the communities, thus rendering the lifespan short (Toyobo & Tanimomo, 2011) and in most cases, the communities were cut off from projects' implementation (Toyobo *et al*, 2011).

Methodology

Multi-stage sampling was adopted for this study. Oyo State was divided into three regions: Oyo north, Oyo south and Oyo central; Oyo north was purposively chosen. Oyo north was equally divided into four regions: Irepodun, Iseyin, Kajola and Ifedapo that was purposively selected as well. Rural communities in this region (Ifedapo) were identified using a population threshold for rural settlement (i.e. less than 20,000) from NPC population data. Similarly, from the WATSAN, PHCN & NPC data, marginalised rural communities in terms of basic facilities provision were identified and ten communities were randomly selected from this list. These communities include Wasangare, Palapala, Alabate, Soro, Aba-aladie, Aba-alakuko, Seriki, Adanla, Papa and Budo-okiti. The community leaders and the female leaders in each community were sampled to gather data about their level of awareness about projects within their communities using an interview guide. The Interview guide is more useful when capturing general issues that have to do with opinions, attitudes and feelings, and helps in obtaining deep and accurate information. Ground-truthing of the secondary data collected was done through observation. The editors and proprietors of the newspaper outfits were also interviewed

through telephone regarding their involvement in the development activities of the local governments in Oke-Ogun. All the analyses were done using descriptive statistics.

Results and Discussion

Data on the socio-economic profile of the respondents show that the selected areas typify rural communities as characterized by their main occupation, agriculture. As depicted in table 2, 85% of the respondents were primarily farmers; the income distribution reflects that about 80% earn between N5000-N10, 000 monthly. The educational status indicates that three-quarters (75%) of the respondents had no formal education, about 20% had primary education and the remaining 5% did not go beyond secondary school. When asked about facilities provision by the local governments to their communities, they submitted differently that they have been left out in the scheme of things stressing further that the neighbouring communities that have benefited have been able to do so during the electioneering campaign of the politicians.

Table 2: Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents

Socio-economic Indicator	Freq.	%
Sex		
Male	12	60
Female	8	40
Education		
No formal education certificate	15	75
Primary school certificate	4	20
Secondary school certificate	1	5
Tertiary school certificate	-	-
Occupation		
Farming	17	85
Civil service	1	5
Unemployed	2	10
Artisanship	-	-
Income per Month		
<N5,000	3	15
N5,001 & N10,000	16	80
N10,001 & N20,000	1	5
Above N20,000	-	-

Field survey, 2013

The interpretation of table 3 which gives a summary of communities with basic infrastructural facilities in Ifedapo region of Oke-ogun implies that 2% of the rural settlements in the region were linked with tarred or graded roads; 4% and 1.2% was served with electricity and postal services respectively. Only 5% of the communities had access to potable water. Inadequate road provision has implication for access to markets, extension services etc. The lack of potable water and electricity also has direct impact on the health status and general quality of life.

Table 3: Access to Infrastructure by Rural Settlements in Ifedapo (Saki East, West & Atisbo)

Local Government	No of Settlements	Number of Rural Settlements with Access to			
		Road	Potable Water	Electricity	Postal Service
Saki East	137	1	4	4	3
Saki West	91	-	2	-	-
Atisbo	89	5	8	8	1
Total	317	6	16	12	4

Source: Ajadi, 2003

Among the various impacts which the lack of or inadequate facilities have had on the studied communities' people according to the study include stagnant/redundant economy characterised by unemployment and general impoverisation, both emanating from lack of access to basic facilities that will enhance markets and improve productivity (table 4). The health of the inhabitants is fast deteriorating (incidences of cholera, typhoid and other water related diseases are becoming more frequent.

Some of the reasons given for not benefiting from provision of the services by the local governments include politicisation by the leadership in the distribution of basic facilities which in any case are grossly inadequate to serve the entire region. The respondents claimed that they were not carried along at all. The responses of the private local media proprietor and editor: Oke-Ogun news and Onko voice were the same. In the telephone chats, the spokesmen of the two media outfits differently said that the local governments only called upon them at their chosen time to cover what they were instructed to in their editions.

Table 4: Rural Settlements in Saki East, West and Atisbo with Infrastructural Facilities

Local Area	Govt. Rural Settlements	Water Source	Quantity available	Electricity Source
Saki East	Oje-Owode	Borehole	11	PHCN
	Sepeteri	"	5	"
	Ago-Amodu	"	5	"
	Ogboro	"	3	"
	Agbonle	"	1	"
Sub-total			25	
Atisbo	Basi	"	1	"
	Ago-Are	"	1	"
	Agunrege	"	1	"
	Irawo-Owode	"	1	"
	Ofiki	"	1	"
	Irawo-Ile	"	2	"
	Sabe	"	1	"
	Owo	"	1	"
Sub-total			9	
Saki	Imua	"	1	Nil
West	Ekokan	"	1	Nil
Sub-total			2	
Grand Total			36	

Source: 1. NPC 2. Oyo State Water Corporation & WATSAN, 2003. Adapted from Ajadi (2003)

Conclusion

Though not yet effective and efficient, the resilience of local government administrations to foster development at the grassroots level in the country cannot be over-emphasized. This study, like the previous ones, shows that impacts of the administration is grossly unsatisfactory because of the inadequate or lack of attention, in terms of provision of basic facilities given to people at this level of governance. What the study observed was that the grassroots people are yet to properly conceive and articulate their position in governance. Should community development efforts (self help) be concentrated upon, two implications are likely: it will mean that the leadership and officials of the local governments will be allowed to continue to embezzle by not providing basic facilities for the grassroots people which is one of their core functions, and the rural people being considered poor may not be able to pool enough resources together to cater for infrastructural facilities that are key to the development of their

resources and improve their quality of life. In view of this, the following are suggested.

There is the need for extension programmes to the rural communities to educate the rural people on the need to have adequate information about local governments' projects' programmes. This will instill in them that they are part of the government and that it is within their rights to know without any fear or feeling of inadequacy.

Having understood the above, the rural women being the prime target of empowerment should be encouraged to form a project plan team or group. The group will be responsible for participation in the programmes relating to the design, execution, monitoring and evaluation of the local government projects and development activities. Due to the literacy level of the rural women, it is suggested that there should be collaboration between the project group of the women and private media correspondents to assist in the dissemination of information relating to local governments' facilities provision within the rural communities. This will imply that the activities of the media (private) should extend to this. The donor agencies should lend their support. The local media may even be used to serve as feedback mechanism in their relief programmes to the rural communities.

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