Local Government Administration and Communal Clashes in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper notes that the increasing communal clashes in local areas are not caused by prevailing disputes such as land disputes, ethnic intolerance, cultural or religious extremism but persistent anomalies, inconsistencies in service delivery performance that have been continued over the years. It is quite an irony that in an era of democratic governance where networks, partnerships and participation of citizens are being advanced and practiced, and where citizens are seen as important stakeholders in governance, local communities are now engaging themselves, not government, in battles that leave chilly marks in political history. The problem may have nothing to do with the dangerous weapons used by electorates against one another but how policies over the years have let the majority of the general populace down. This paper is a product of a current research on community perception in measuring local government service delivery performance in Nigeria as a developing country. The aim of this paper is to contribute to research on problems of community underdevelopment and unrest in democratic Nigeria.

Keywords: Local government, accountability, performance measurement, governance, networking

Introduction

Since the restoration of democracy, evidence shows an increase in communal, ethnic and religious violence that have left thousands dead. Evidence from the literature affirms that partnerships and

involvement of local citizens in community development can help address the issues of violence. According to Hohe (2002), the idea of a democratic state is a state that allows citizens to participate in decisions concerning them. If the youths in local communities continue to be persecuted or neglected in the scheme of things, then they can be used by terrorists and politicians to perpetrate mayhem. This paper provides research information with evidence of Western and European order of network and community partnerships in local development. The problem may not be about autonomy but about resolving the issues of corruption, accountability and underperformance.

Local government administrations in Nigeria

The United Nations defines local government as a political subdivision of a nation or state which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the power to impose taxes or exact labor for prescribed purposes while the 1976 constitution defined local government as the government at local level exercised through elected representatives established by law to exercise specific powers within defined territories (Igbuzor, 2002). The implication is that local government is composed of elected officers and has constitutional authority to perform certain roles in their local areas.

Historical evidence shows that local government found its roots in the British colonial administration (Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2011; Oviasuyi et al, 2010). Although, within this evidence, Cameron (1934) says it was basically a native administration without really functioning as a constitutional local government system. The meaning of this statement was captured below by Cameron (1934):

> The native administration was designed to adapt to purposes of local government, a tribal institution which the native people have evolved for themselves so that the latter may develop in a constitutional manner from their own past, guided and restrained by the traditions and sanctions which they have inherited, molded or modified as they may be on the advice of the British officers. It is a necessary part of the system within the limitations, the British Government rules through the native institutions which are regarded as an important part of the machinery of government with well-

defined powers and functions recognized by the Government and by law... (Cameron, 1934).

The Native administration formed by the British colonial masters had functions of collection of taxes, maintenance of law and order, construction of road and maintenance and sanitary duties (Cameron 1934). But even at this time, there were controversies. For example, there were reported problems of tax payment and problems of assimilation, indirect rule, culture (Ikime, 1969). During this period, (Igbuzor, 2002) posits that the first elected local government council was established based on the British Whitehall system in Lagos in former eastern and western regions. Under the British style, regions were divided into local, urban councils, local counties and local councils.

- The local government reforms between 1951 and 1952: Reformations and modernization era
- Military coup in 1966: Military command takeover as a result of civil war
- Local government reform in 1976: this was the era when people had more political responsibility and when economic and social developments were pursued for the local people.

The 1950s brought about modernization and reformations. During this period, (Igbuzor, 2002) posits that the first elected local government council was established based on the British Whitehall system in Lagos in former eastern and western regions. Under the British style, regions were divided into local urban councils, local counties and local councils aimed at democratizing the regions. However, there were increasing calls for independence.

After the independence in 1960, the powers of councils to levy education and general rates was abolished. According to Igbuzor (2002), the period between 1960 and 1966 was fraught with less emphasis on the duties and significance of local government functions in Nigeria. The outbreak of the civil war in 1966 ushered in the military leading to new experiments on administering local government (Ekwu, 2003).

The year 1976 brought in new developments in the local government system as it established a uniform system of local

government throughout the country (Oviasuyi, 2010). In 1979, there was another reform that took place in Nigeria's local government system. According to Ekpo and Ndebbio (1998), the 1979 constitution empowered the national assembly and state governments to determine what proportion of the federation and state revenue should be allocated to the local government. But this brought more confusion and politics into the local government system with power show between state governments and local governments on the one hand and between state and federal government on the other hand, for example, Oviasuyi et al (2010) reports that the case of the long standing disagreement between the federal government and Lagos state was as a result of the complexity and confusion arising from the 1979 constitution. Thus, Oviasuyi et al (2010) stated that the powers of the federal government wrongly undermined elected and participatory governance and responsibility at the grassroots while Ogan (1980) stated that;

> "Local Governments are not creatures of State Governments but one of the tiers of Nigeria and every effort should be made to allow Local Government Councils to operate with prestige and not as beggars of a State ministry of finance begging for money''.

The 1999 constitution established under the military brought more confusion as it gave the state more powers and control over the local government (Oviasuyi et al, 2010). The provision stated that the government of every state subject to section 8 of the constitution must ensure the existence of local governments under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition and finances of the local government. The implication of this which is still the bone of contention till date is that although local governments are constitutionally recognized as third tier, but they operate without full autonomy.

Problems of local government administration in Nigeria

Scholars have focused on the problems of local government particularly in Nigeria and how they have been unable to excel in their constitutional roles (Abiona and Bello, 2013; Oviasuyi et al, 2010; Ibem, 2009; 2012; Oediran and Ogundiran, 2013; Akpan, 2013; Yakubu and Abass, 2012; Oyediran and Ogundiran, 2013; Olusanya 2012; Soludo,

2013). Most of the articles report a catalogue of woes when it comes to local government performance in Nigeria.

Akpan (2013), reports that the problem of local government relates to the issues of politics and autonomy. The problem radiates around the political class or situation determining the extent to which a local government can be autonomous in its operations. With the state government being conferred powers over the local government as stated in the 1999 constitution, the state governor thus dictates the tempo, style and rhythm of local government as well as how much allocation is received.

Oyediran and Ogundiran (2013), argues that the problem of local government in Nigeria is that they do not involve the local people in governance leading to a lack of knowledge by the people of who their supposedly elected officers are. The result is that infrastructure and developmental projects are imposed on the local communities. This assertion corroborates Akpan's (2013) suggestion that elections in local government are more or less determined by the governors not the populace.

Furthermore, Oviasuyi et al (2010), supports the two scholars mentioned above. Local government in Nigeria have not been able to bring governance closer to the people, common interest of the people have not been preserved, transparency has been poor as well as poor accountability, responsiveness and poor efficiency and effectiveness of resources. Hence, service delivery has been poor. Akpan (2013) observes that the problems local government in Nigeria have, is that they do not have a personality distinct from the state and federal government, they have no capacity to formulate and execute its policies and no ability to make laws, rules and regulations. Therefore, the problem of full autonomy is a barrier to community development.

However, the question is whether autonomy will automatically improve performances and affect the local populace positively baring the glaring issues of corruption. This brings us to the realm of local governance embedded in a network system where citizens are given active roles in community development plans (Breithbarth et al 2010;

Bratton 2012; Gonzalez et al 2013; Barrutia and Echebarria 2012; Waheduzzaman 2010). According to Hohe (2002), the idea of a democratic state is a state that allows citizens to participate in decisions concerning them. However, most populations have not experienced this even in democracy, thus the rewards of democracy are not being felt by the people.

Communal clashes, democracy and networks

Since the restoration of democracy in Nigeria, inter and intra communal clashes have been rife leaving a question mark as to what role democracy plays in community development. Ukiwo (2003), reports that the reason for this is the emergent multiparty systems of African democracy which greatly increased ethnicity tensions across communities leading to clashes, chaos, bloodshed and death.

Human Rights Watch (2014), reports on the escalating violence in 5 states of the north central region of Nigeria which has led to thousands of deaths. Also, Adama (2014) presented a report of the terror in Jos communities which began since 2001. According to Adama (2014), Jos which used to be a peaceful city suddenly began to experience enduring cycle of violence stemming from disputes over land, resources and political power as well as other ethnic differences. As a result, over 7,000 lives have been lost. A key finding from the publication is that the young people of the community are responsible because of their association with political, religious and ethnic violence caused by unemployment. Although, it could be argued that employed youths are also likely to be involved. The recommendation from this report is significant; youths who engage in violence should be involved in peace initiatives and developmental plans otherwise, other terrorist organizations may use them (Adama, 2014).

The question is why would a democratic state which is supposed to be seen fulfilling public interest, now become a catalyst for wanton destruction and chaos. According to Schmitter (1996), the reason for this is not far-fetched; legitimate political units are absent. This brings us again to the question of local government and networks. In a democratic state, what impact will partnerships and networks make in legitimizing local governance?

Carley (2006), states that partnership and network is an important alternative approach to the challenges of public sector management and governance. In local governance, partnership involves local government and individuals working for the neighborhood or village development (Carley, 2006). According to Aristotle (384-322BC), every City State which is the highest community, must aim at achieving the general good for all of its citizens. Citizens are partners living in a community pursuing a common good and the role of the city is to make citizens achieve virtue and happiness.

Print (2007) argues that it is the involvement of citizens in community development in a democratic system that strengthens the legitimacy of the government of the day. This is because when citizens vote in their representatives, they can decide whether these representatives are functioning or not and if they are not, they have the right to protest. In essence, partnership in governance is linked to accountability (World Bank, 2006). Many writers in Nigerian literature on local government have dwelt too much on the problems and very few are focusing on the need to increase transparency and accountability as a way of minimizing communal clashes and death. The question is how do we improve local accountability and transparency?

Networks, accountability and local governance

Local government is described as the bedrock of democracy encouraging participation (Oviasuyi et al, 2010) for the overall development of the state. If democracy is all about participation and involvement, then communities must be carried along with responsibility and openness. The theory of governance and accountability involves the steering and coordination of various actors in a network relationship. It involves a collaborative and connective system of steering and decision making in public service delivery (Saikku and Karjalainen, 2012; Rhodes et al, 2012). It is connected to co-production and networking with citizens, in the production and provision of public services (Witte and Geys, 2012).

In this instance, it could be right to say then that when local government operate with a collaborative system of networking, then

accountability is certain because all the stakeholders or components of the society are in common interaction for the common good. Tabi and Verdon (2014) says governance theory requires strengthening the democratic ties in a society by activating the dialogue between citizens and the organizing authority. The implication of this is that public policy becomes open to civil society but this must be assessed from the standpoint of the common good and general interest not to individual interests (Tabi and Verdon, 2014).

Therefore, instead of focusing on crucifying the perpetrators of communal violence, could it be better to start focusing on improving relationships with members of the local communities towards building the community, providing more effective and efficient services, improving transparency and promoting accountability? Western and European researchers have since began to analyze how transparency, accountability and networks in governance can have positive impacts on community developments while African researchers are mostly focusing on the problems and failures of democracy. Most of the western and European researchers provide evidence that the way to improve accountability, transparency and legitimacy is to promote performance measurement.

Performance measurement and accountability

Osborne (2010) states that public policy implementation has passed through three stages in the design and delivery of public services and they include; the traditional model of public administration which started from the early nineteenth century to the late 1970s and early 1980s, new public management which started from the early 1980s and the emergent regime, the new public governance which came into focus in the 1990s.

Specifically, new public management, NPM became more popular in the 1980s when Prime Minister Thatcher of Britain (1979-89) and USA president elect Ronald Reagan (1980-89) decided public administration should take a more businesslike approach which was the one direction governments and commentators across the world were clamoring for (Hood, 1991).In America, it was labeled "Reinventing Government'' inspired by Osborne and Gaebler (1992) with a belief that

if government is seen as an entrepreneurship, then success in public governance was certain (See Osborne and Gaebler, Reinventing Government 1992). It contained principles that provided a means to solving management problems in the context of organizations, policy fields, levels of government, states and countries (Hood, 1991). Pollit and Bourchert (2011) defined NPM as a doctrine which focuses on improving public management, making use of business concepts, values and techniques. Secondly, NPM was defined as practices that emphasize performance derived typically through measurements of outputs (Pollitt and Bouchert, 2011).

It seems as it were that NPM introduced competition, privatization and managerial emphasis into public service with a need for more accountability as well as developing a modern organization that recognizes the presence of customers, pursues effectiveness and efficiency, increases the independence of managers, taking responsibility for results. However, amongst other criticisms, NPM failed to state what methods are best applicable for addressing issues of corruption or how performance can be measured in order to enforce accountability and transparency.

According to Andrews and Van de Walle, (2012), to address the issues of corruption and accountability in public service, there must be a proper system of measuring performance and in doing this; the views of citizens cannot be ignored. This is where new public governance comes in, defined as a system of participation and networks in maximizing the common good or interest in society (UNDP, 1997). The question is what relationship does New Public Governance have with Performance Measurement and accountability?

Firstly, we find as part of a wider study, that performance measurement is not the same thing as performance management as this has been mistaken by some authors. Performance measurement is a tool of performance management. It is a designed process that involves developing the capacity system for organizational performance (Broadbent and Laughlin, 2009). According to Broadbent and Laughlin (2009), performance management involves planning work and setting expectations, continually monitoring performance, rating performance

periodically and rewarding based on performance. In order to achieve this, then performance needs to be measured.

Performance management is viewed more broadly as a management tool that is aimed at improving the performance of an organization while performance measurement focuses more on the use of performance metrics to determine how an organization is performing, making performance measurement an important tool for performance management (Goh, 2012). Thus, performance measurement helps to ascertain whether an organization is performing as it should, based on its objectives and budget. It is a feedback mechanism to making continuous adjustments in pursuit of long-term performance goals (Breithbarth et al, 2010). It is not for the purpose of this paper to elaborate on the various propositions or approaches for measuring performance in public service but to focus on how NPG has espoused us to a system of networks or involvement of citizens and members of community in measuring performance.

According to Pollitt (2003), NPG connotes a system of network governance, collaborative government, public-private partnerships and joined-up government. It is a system which generates an aspiration to achieve all round thinking and action, making it possible for citizens to have access to consistent services (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; Huxham and Vangen, 2006; Mandell, 2001, Perri 6, 2004). The core of NPG according to Pestoff (2011) is an emphasis on citizen participation and third sector provision of public services which neither traditional public administration nor new public management could provide. Borzel and Risse (2010) provide that governance is more legitimate as more local communities and citizens are involved in rulemaking and the provision of public services. If there are to be third party actors in the provision of services and governance, then, its legitimacy is derived by taking the views of citizens into account (Borzel and Risse, 2010). This effectively means performance measurement involves finding out from citizens for whom services are provided how much such services have satisfied expectations. This may be how accountability can be promoted in public service. When developing performance reports and information, are citizens involved? Is performance information

accessible or is it only the service providers that are privileged to have such information?

Implications of citizen's involvement in performance measures and communal conflicts resolution

How will citizens' involvement in performance measurement help to address issues of communal clashes in Nigeria's local government? Firstly, it is safe to state that this paper assumes that the problems of communal clashes in Nigeria is related to the level of satisfaction of the people living in such communities with the level of performance of the local government administration assigned to rule over such communities. Therefore, in resolving these problems, it is important to assess how those who rule over such communities are functioning and performing. There is always bound to be conflict in areas where people are dissatisfied and unhappy especially with developmental practices of government in such areas. It is also the assumption of this paper that citizens legitimize the government that rule over them (Borzel and Risse, 2010). Therefore, networking with citizens in local governance can help solve most of these local problems.

Ethnicity and communal clashes may not totally be resolved by granting local government autonomy but by addressing issues of corruption, accountability, transparency and performance (Tan et al, 2011; Cassia and Magno, 2011; Rhodes et al, 2012; Almquist et al, 2012). Several studies have investigated performance related issues in local government e.g. (Ni Putu et al, 2012; Tan et al, 2011; Yetano, 2013; Barrutia and Echebarria, 2012; Rivenbark and Ballard, 2012; Amirkhanyan, 2011; Cruz and Marques, 2013; Bratton, 2012; Akinboade et al, 2012). Most of the findings from these researches show that PM is very relevant in local government. A major reason for this is that accountability mechanisms are generally weaker at the local level (Martin et al, 2013). When local governments operate without accountability to both the Federal or State government and the people they are governing, then there is likely to be corruption and underperformance leading to protests and communal fighting. Soludo (2013) lists two key factors which can demonstrate the performance or underperformance of a local government; poverty eradication and job unemployment. Incidentally, local governments in Nigeria have failed

when it comes to these two factors indicating underperformance. A community where poverty is increasing and the youths or those qualified for certain jobs remain unemployed, the result is likely to be involvement in destructive activities.

Thus, Almquist et al, (2012), states that we have come to an era where the role of citizens in public governance goes further than collaborative systems of producing and delivering service but also assessing performance and scrutinizing resources. It implies allowing citizens whether as individuals or groups to be part of the productive process. In this instance, it includes the policy making decisions, information gathering process, performance monitoring, service production and delivery process and the performance measurement process.

This can create more value for members of the public as well as help improve public sector accountability (Rhodes et al, 2012; Tan et al, 2011). When members of the public have access to information on the quality and quantity of services delivered to their constituents, it can increase transparency, trust and confidence in governance (Tan et al, 2011). Some of the theories identified in the literature of performance measurement such as public service theory, legitimacy, innovative, stakeholder, public sector governance and accountability, leadership and others indicate that involving citizens in the productive, delivery and feedback process can improve performance, confidence and trust.

However, as part of further research which we are currently undertaking, most of these conceptions are associated with Western and European countries. There is still yet to be proof of its workability and effect in the African context. Also, there have been identifiable problems in network relationships such as the problem of having a single voice, objectives or even the impact citizens can have in policy development Conaty (2012). Also, Waheduzzaman, (2010) found out that most people from a lower income bracket in local communities are less likely to participate in the governmental process as against people with a higher income. This though, is not yet proved in Nigeria's local government.

Conclusion and recommendations

As a way of concluding this paper, it is imperative to state that the findings are inconclusive, so we cannot say for certain that the clearest direction for addressing the issue of local government performance and communal clashes is to introduce a performance measurement system that involves a network of community members who are users of local government services.

However, we can state from evidence from Western and European literature that a network system of performance measurement in public service can provide more transparency and accountability in governance. It is assumed in this paper that communal clashes are caused mostly as a result of dissatisfaction and poor performance from local government, who are created for grassroots development and are described as the bedrock of local democracy. Therefore, a system of communal dialogue in service production and provision may be helpful in understanding more about the needs of the local people and driving performances.

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