UNIJERPS
Unizik Journal of Educational Research and Policy Studies VOL.17 (3);
January-June, 2024 https://unijerps.org
2023 Impact Factor: 6.834; 2022 *Impact Factor*: 5.156; *2021 Impact Factor: 5.641;*
2020 Impact Factor: 5.355. *Indexing and Impact Factor URL: http://sjifactor.com/passport.php?id=21363*

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: THE STATUS-QUO AND WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT
The concept of community development, Local government system and their roles in community development. It elucidates the functionaries of the local government administration and their roles in community development. Furthermore, it highlights the existing state of affairs in respect of local government administration and community development by focusing on the debasing state of affairs in most of the LGAs in Nigeria. The study recommended among others that joint account between the state and the local government should be abolished and people should summon enough will power to challenge the ills of the society because power belongs to the people.

Keywords*:* Local government and Community development.

Introduction
Community development is seen as a collective movement which seeks to promote participative democracy, improved standard of living, human rights, equal opportunities and social justice through educating and empowering people for their common good in order to make their lives and communities better. It is described as a vehicle for the overall national and human development (Obidiegwu, 2023). According to Kenny (2017), Community development is a term used to refer to a holistic approach grounded in principle of empowerment and collective actions. It is a vital tool for physical, attitudinal and personal advancement. Globally It is greatly recognized as a means to influencing overall national and global development (Adeyemi, 2012). Community can be categorized into urban, semi urban, and rural communities (Scott, 2016). Each community in Nigeria belongs to a local government area (LGA). Hence, in Nigeria, there are 774 LGAs. LGA is the third tier of government which is closer to the people and bequeathed with the responsibility of developing the people and their communities. Akhakpe (2012) described LGA as the government at the grass root level governed through a representative council established by law to exercise specific powers and authority within defined areas. According to Marshall and Keough (2014), in many circles of development, local government as the

third tier of government is instituted to operate extensively in communities for provision of social services, health, and education among others. According to Abugu (2014), the objectives of LG administration include meeting the specific grassroots needs of the people, providing democratic and accountable government for the people, providing services to communities in a sustainable manner; promoting social and economic development, promoting social and healthy environment and encouraging local participation in government policies. Nwankwo (2012) noted that LGA is set up to provide opportunities for people to practice democracy; provide basic services to citizens at the local level; help local citizens solve community problems and needs that they cannot solve on their own; provide governance to local citizens, and serve as a useful tool for governing the country.

Thorough look at the objectives of the LG shows that the entire initiative of LGA is to serve humanity particularly at the grass root level which is appropriate for efficient and effective local, state and federal government administration. However, from practical assessment, it seems that most communities particularly in the rural areas do not feel the presence of the government because their standard of living is quite low and discouraging. This may therefore imply that the actual representative functions and objectives of LGAs in Nigeria are not being met. Many communities in Nigeria live in an insecure environment. Furthermore, unemployment, ritual killings, kidnapping, child trafficking, penury, destitution, extreme poverty, among other social ills are prevalent in most communities. Hence, the researcher intends to discuss the role of local government in community development by raising issues and advancing the way forward. To achieve this objective, the paper discusses the meaning of community development; local government system in Nigeria functionaries of the local government administration and their role in community development, the status quo in Nigeria in respect of local government administration and community development; implication of the study and recommendation / way forward.

Concept of community development

Community development refers to all the strategies aimed at promoting the socio-economic status of the different communities. It aimed at mobilizing communities to utilize their full potentials in order to embark on projects and programmes which will help them improve their standard of living. According to Lotz (2011), community development is a conscious technique or process to solve social change problems; a process that enables communities to "collectively confront and act on their common values and problems" Green and Haines (2012) described community development as a planned effort to build assets that increase the capacity of residents to improve their quality of lives. The authors noted that these assets may include several forms of community capital such as physical, human, social, financial, environmental, political and cultural. Okoro (2023) asserted that community development involves the communities, governments and non-governmental associations as stakeholders. Community development hold

sway in many spheres of life including education, economic, sociology, political, urban as well as regional planning and it is among the most diversified practice in history (Phillips & Pittman 2014).

United Nations (2011) stressed that community development includes the effort of the government united with that of the people themselves. Thus, the efforts of the people themselves are united with that of the governmental authorities to improve the economic and social well-being of people to enable them to contribute fully in national progress (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2010). Community development is a process in which people come together to take action on what is important to them. Community development is rooted in the belief that all people should have access to health, wellbeing, wealth, justice and opportunities. It also involves local people seeking and taking advantage of opportunities, identifying and using their assets or working together to solve problems (UNESCO, 2014).

Umalele (2015) refers to community development as improving the standard of living of the masses, by making the processes of their development self-sustaining. The author affirmed that community development advocates mass participation, equitable distribution of resources and development of appropriate skills. Umalele equally described community development as an effort towards improving the standard of living of the people. According to Belloncle in Ogbunga (2013), community development would be implemented through a comparative organization which would find its strength in the traditional egalitarian values, which some ardently maintained were the continuing basic of village life. The author argues that community development should deal with the traditionalistic models and egalitarian values of the rural populace; hence, the author described community development as a deliberate effort towards improving the value-system of the people in a community.

Mcnamara in Ogbunga (2013) asserted that development takes place through the provision of amenities and improvement of nutritional value of rural food consumption; it improves the quality of life of the rural people, hence, making them productive and capable of contributing to national economy. Ezea in Ogbunga (2013) sees community development as that part of development that seeks to enhance the quality of life in the rural area by providing basic infrastructural facilities. These essential basics of life cannot be provided without the presence of the government. The third tier of government which is the local government is therefore entrusted with the responsibility of providing democratic governance, basic amenities and standard of living which is worthwhile in the rural areas.

Concept of Local government system in Nigeria

Local government is a generic term for the lowest tier of public administration within a particular sovereign state. Local government administration in Nigeria began during British colonial rule, but it was not uniform at the time. In 1976, the Nigerian government implemented a reform that introduced a

uniform system of local government administration throughout the country. It recognized local government as the third tier of government, and granted it financial and functional autonomy. The reason for the establishment of local government is for the people to engage in activities of the government which is brought nearer to the people (Abugu, 2014).

Nigeria has 774 local government areas (LGAs), each administered by a local government council consisting of a chairman, who is the chief executive, and the other elected members, who are referred to as councilors. Each LGA is further subdivided into a minimum of ten and a maximum of twenty wards (FRN, 1999). The establishment of local and state governments is justified by the fact that the federal government is often slow and unresponsive due to the concentration of power and resources at the center. Local and state governments are closer to the people and can therefore better understand and address the people's needs. According to Omomayowa and Oluwaseun (2020), the local government is the government at the grass roots which has its populace and constitutional power to elect officials for the administrative and regulatory functions in the local area. Local governments in Nigeria are single tier government responsible for providing basic services to the people (Doho, Ahmed, & Umar, 2018).

The Guidelines for Local Government reform (1976), defined local government as government at the local level established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas, to initiate and direct the provision of services, to determine and implement project so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, to ensure that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized. According to the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, local government functions are not limited to: representing councils with substantial control over local development area affairs but provision of services and implementation of projects in their areas of jurisdiction and also complementing the activities of both state and federal government (FRN, 1999). Local government adequately recognized the need for local government autonomy. It is the means by which the common problems and needs of a community are economically and effectively catered for. This shows that local government is the major source by which a local community solve their common needs and problems. However, over time, the performances of these local governments in Nigeria were characterized by some irregularities and challenges. These include corruption, political intrusion, and instability, lack of autonomy, funding, infrastructural decay, constitutional problems among others. The following section discusses the functionaries of the local government.

Functionaries of the local government administration and their roles in community development (The ideal process)

The system of the government in Nigeria is a three-tier system, consisting of the federal, state and local governments. According to Doho, Ahmed, & Umar (2018), local

governments in Nigeria are single tier government responsible for providing basic services to the people. Local governments provide peculiar services particularly to rural communities. It unites people in a defined area to complement the effort of the central government for the satisfaction of common community needs. As explained in the background, LG administration is the bedrock on which sustainable community development is achieved. This implies that the efficient and effective running of the local government system leads to the wellbeing of the people while if it is inefficiently run, the whole system may collapse. The above subheading is explained using the organogram of the LGA in Nigeria as follows:

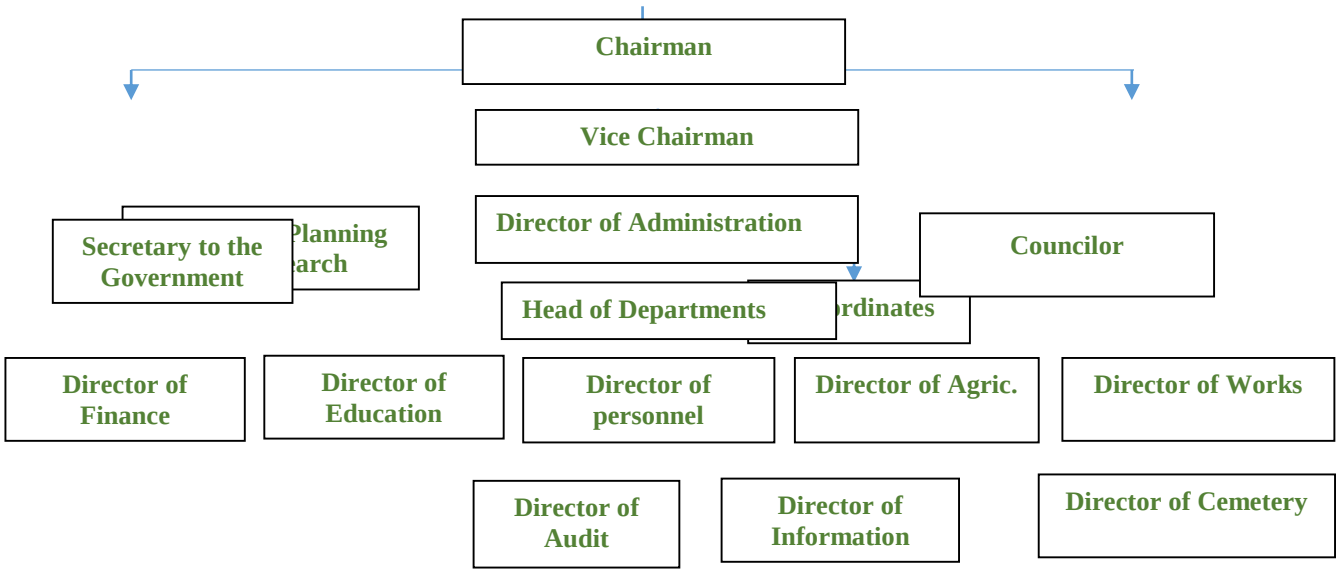


Fig. 1: Organogram of the Local government structure in Nigeria
Source: Adapted From Nwankwo (2012)

Fig.1 show that the chairman is the head of affairs of the government at the local level. He performs numerous functions, which include : administrating to the various departments; observing and complying fully with the checks and balances spelt out in the existing guidelines and financial regulations governing receipts; he directs the affairs of the local government; he allocates responsibilities to the vice chairman, supervisors and secretary to the local government He also render quarterly returns of the actual income and expenditure of the local government to the state government for necessary action. Beyond these, the chairman also conducts the meeting of the executive committee of the local government – vice-chairman, supervisors and secretary. In exercising his powers and discharging his administrative and financial functions, he

acts mainly to improve the affairs of the catchment communities geared towards community development.

The vice-chairman in the administration of the local government is assigned the responsibility of administering departments of the local government. He acts for the chairman in his absence. He also provides support and assistance to the chairman in carrying out his or her responsibilities and duties as the principal representative of the LGA. All of which works to contribute in improving the common good of communities which is geared towards community development.

In the third cadre of the organogram are the secretary, director of administration and councilors.

The secretary is an appointee of the chairman. In his capacity as the secretary to the local government, he performs the following functions: Secretary to the meetings of the Executive Committee of the local government and keeping the records of the meetings; coordination of the activities of the departments of the local government; liaising on behalf of the chairman with the local government council through the leader of the council; liaising with the appropriate officers of the state government on state local relations and carrying out other duties that may be assigned to him from time to time to improve the affairs of communities within their controls.

Councilors are local government officers elected to represent the interest of their local community in the local government areas. They have an important role in many of the major decisions that affect peoples' lives, among which are; to investigate community members concern, communicate council decisions that affect them. Represent their views at council meetings for enhancing community development. They ensure that development is translated in practical terms to communities they are representing.

Director of Administration serve as the chief Administrative Officer and coordinator of all departmental activities and assist in conjunction with the secretary. As the head of personnel management, he also help in developing of organizational policies; managing administrative budget; hiring and training administrative staff; negotiating contracts and agreement with vendors. He maintains cooperative relationship in order to contribute to community development. The Executive arm of LGA is assisted by support staff which include heads of the various departments in the local government.

Heads of departments are in charge of the departments. Their responsibilities include the day to day administration and management of staff and affairs. They are in-charge of management of personnel, legal and general administration of the local government. They operate through directors such as: Director of finance, works, agriculture, primary health and personnel. All of them works together to improve the affairs of communities under their jurisdiction.

The Director of Finance is responsible for the local government financial health and growth. He establishes strategies that will earn profits, oversee accounting operations,

and produce accurate reports of government expenditures for the development of the local government in the interest of the communities under their jurisdiction.

The Director of Education is in charge of ensuring excellence in public education, as well as equal access to public education at primary and secondary schools and through community learning centers. He ensures students welfare, educational leadership, fiscal responsibility, organizational management, strategic planning and policy/procedural implementation among others, towards community development.

The Director of Agriculture conducts survey for the collection and maintenance of a wide range of statistical and economic data relating to agriculture, required for development planning which tends towards improving the affairs of community. He oversees his units' activities in relation to agricultural development and agri-businesses in communities.
The Director of personnel is responsible for directing and supervising the staff of the organization, interpreting and implementing management policy decision to the knowledge and understanding of the workers and tries to integrate it with the organization objectives in order to achieve greater success.

The Director of information is responsible for providing information to community members on relevant issues affecting their lives. Such information are provided in areas of health, economy and education for improvement of literacy level and survival.

The Director of Audit is responsible for auditing the public accounts, finance, projects and records of the local government council development areas. His job checkmates the daily dealings such as keeping financial records and establishing financial accuracy for effective financial and management control of the local government accounts among others.

The Director of cemetery is responsible for the correct handling and interment of human remains, providing public access, administration and record- keeping, and general maintenance and upkeep of the cemetery premises. The services provided by him enhance community development.

The Director of primary healthcare is responsible for directing health personnel to support health needs of community members. This enhances building of hospitals, health promotion to disease prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, immunization among others. By doing this, he ensures that health care is delivered in a way that is focused on people's needs and respects their preferences. This is geared towards improving the affairs of the community to enhance community development.

The Director of works and services is in-charge of the affairs of the public works department. He is responsible for supervising and maintaining physical development, transportation and general maintenance services and projects of the local government. For example, these activities tends towards improving the affairs and infrastructure of

community members inspiring them towards better living for community development (FRN 1999)

However, at the present time in Nigeria, it seems quite glaring that communities at the grass root do not feel the presence and impact of the local government administrators because of the level of poverty, ill health, neglect, insecurity, unemployment and penury that people suffer in different communities. In addition, the mortality rate is too high and economic condition seems to worsen rather than improve because development do not trickle down to the people. The researcher therefore deems it quite necessary to report briefly in the next section some of the existing state of affairs in LG administration in Nigeria which impacts on community development and affects the lives of the people at the grass root.

Status-quo in Nigeria in respect of local government administration and community development

Presently in Nigeria, it is quite regrettable and disappointing the way local government areas are run. The local government is supposed to be the bases of democracy in Nigeria. The Nigerian constitution (1999) maintained that LGA election must be done democratically by the state government in a manner that is devoid of any manipulation, however, at the present time many states have no elected local government chairmen but transition/caretaker committees appointed by the Governors of such states, for example such states include; Plateau, Kaduna, Kano, Anambra, Akwa Ibom, Rivers and Enugu among others. These transition chairmen and their committees are usually stooges to the state governors and other influential politician, (Abugu, 2014). They are loyal to most of the state governors who seek their own good and pockets and not the interest of the masses or the common good the people because they are not democratically elected. As a result of this vested interest of the politicians the local government Areas are not run by astute administrators who are trained in local government administration but rather by politicians (Odesanya, 2021) .This therefore creates a great gap between the interests, needs and aspirations of the masses and that of the politicians. This is one of the major reason community development is hard to achieve in Nigeria which affects sustainable and inclusive development.

The issue of manipulation of local government election is followed by corrupt practices which can be described as a cancer which has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society. This is also prevalent in the local government. Resources are misused by individuals in position of power for their personal gains or for selected few. Local government in Nigeria is corruption prone, theft and misappropriation of funds are widespread. For instance in 2007, Nuhu Ribadu, who was the former Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) chairman described local government officials as “lootocrats” who often engage in the gangerism and organized crime (Omotosho, 2023). This engagements most times affect community development. Local government funds are siphoned and diverted through state-local government joint account. This is possible because local government

allocations from the federation account are disbursed through the state governments. Most state governments have taken this advantage to divert part of the allocation to other projects thereby robbing the local governments of the capacity to perform their functions and live up to the expectations of the people. This corrupt practices affect community development and the poor masses are the victims. Abdulhamid and Chima (2015) noted that in practice state government have taken over local government functions to justify spending funds landmarked for the LG councils. This contradicts the provisions of the 1999 constitution and runs contrary to democracy, fairness and justice. In a similarly vein Adeyemi (2023) observed that despite # 9.56 trillion allocation in five years, 774 LGAs are still underdeveloped.

Furthermore, joint account between the state and the local government as stipulated in the 1999 constitution is among the key factors affecting the functionality of the LGA. As a result of the joint account LGAs are dependent on the state government, hence, they lack financial freedom which brings about many negative consequences and perpetrate corruption and embezzlement among the state and local government personnel.

In addition, in Nigeria, democracy and rule of law seem to be limited in application. The laws are manipulated and seems to apply only to the poor masses and not to political and influential elites, sometimes it seems to depend on the political party a person belongs (Omobala,, 2023). The laws are manipulated to serve the whims and caprices of a particular group in the society while the masses, "sons and daughters of nobodies" are left to suffer. Most often the masses are seen to be docile because poverty is weaponised (Kefason, 2019). This affects and perpetrates low level of development, widespread poverty, underutilization of resources and low life expectancy among others particularly in rural communities. This state of affairs in combination with the kind of fake democracy practiced in Nigeria cripples the local government administration which could have provided basic needs and improved livelihood for the communities at the grassroots for sustainable community development (Foluke, 2023)

These bottlenecks contribute immensely to the poor or no funding of all the segments which local government is supposed to address in order to positively impact people's lives (Adeyemi 2023), such as agriculture, infrastructure, micro industries, research, education, rural electricity, dissemination of information among others. This further causes unemployment, insecurity, poor access roads, illiteracy and hunger among others which are discussed briefly below:

Unemployment: Unemployment arose as a result of lack of necessary infrastructure such as water, electricity and access roads. This is a major reason many youths migrate to urban areas for employment opportunities and better life to attract meaningful investment to rural areas. According to Ogbunga (2013), 90 percent of the youth in the rural areas are unemployed.

Insecurity: The challenges of insecurity is such that requires urgent attention in the rural areas.In consonant to this view, Akintunde and Selzing-Musa (2016) opined that a well secured environment that is devoid of security threat is perceived as appropriate setting for survival and sustainable development. The local government has a lot of role to play in addressing insecurity in their catchment areas but in the current time the local government seems devastated because of mismanagement and corruption.

Poor Access Roads: In most communities, there are no access roads. The poor transport system in the rural areas adversely affect the movement of rural producers, causing market inefficiency and above all, reduces rural income which leads to high rate of poverty. On this note Babalola (2021) noted that Nigeria roads are poorly maintained and in a state of disrepair.

Illiteracy: The local government has a big role to play in education to bring about community development. There is a dire need for community vocational training institution, for learning of veritable skills and community learning centers for liberal and continuing education for sustainable community development. Illiteracy is a major bane to development. Suleiman (2022) citing the minister of state for education noted that 31% of the adult population in Nigeria are illiterate

Hunger: A major essence of the local government is to embark on agriculture and services through extension workers who embark on field work and research to inform the farmers on new farming techniques and technology. In the absence of agricultural services, hunger became the order of the day in different communities. In addition, inflation and removal of fuel subsidy by the Bola Ahmed Tinibu's led administration without adequate cushioning effect contributed to severe hardship and penury among the people (Adinnu, 2023).The following section discusses some theories which anchors this study.

Theoretical Framework

Two main theories form the backbone in this discourse. They are the Systems theory by Fester (1980) and Expectancy theory by Victor H. Vroom (1964). The theories help to understand significance of community development.

The system theory

System theory was propounded by Fester in (1980). System theory is necessary to explain community development at local level. According to Fesler, every system (such as a local government) has a purpose, goal or objective in achieving better performance through excellent deeds (in this case, community development). Furthermore, the author elaborates citizen's performance needs to be measured against the stated objectives. Citizens' participation in community development must follow all the requirements and procedures by government at local level for effective involvement (Fesler, 1980). However, in Nigeria, citizens voice and their participation seems undermined to a great extent.

Expectancy theory

Expectancy theory was proposed by Victor H. Vroom (1964).Vroom's expectancy theory assumes that behavior results from conscious choices among alternative whose purpose it is to maximize pleasure and to minimize pain According to the theorist, an alternative approach that assumes citizens' have a variety of goals and strength of their preferences to achieve their target in community development. Additionally, the author noted that people's motivation in a community development will depend on the extent to which they expect a certain activity which lead to some degree of satisfaction. For instance if they think that participating in community development will lead to a greater productivity, they will participate more in all the activities carried out by government. According to the authors, key to motivation is affording citizens some opportunity to achieve their desired goals by empowering them. In Nigeria, citizens seem not to be motivated to achieve their goals. This is the reason the level of poverty and unemployment is increasing each day in both rural and urban communities.

Implication of the study

This paper suggests that local government administration in Nigeria has a lot of humanistic roles and functions bestowed on it to play by the law. However, it is fraught with irregularities, corruption, embezzlement and mismanagement. These results to exacerbation of poverty, hunger, insecurity among others in different communities which hampers community development.

The Way Forward / Recommendations

Based on this research report and analyses, the following recommendations were made:

1. As stipulated by the 1999 constitution, election should be conducted democratically in all the 774 local government areas in Nigeria. Election should be free and fair. Anybody who manipulates the process at any level no matter his social and political status should face capital punishment. This will help to install local government chairmen and counsellors and other personnel who have character and capacity. These crops of personnel will care about the common good of communities in their local government areas. They will seek democratic rule in the right sense of the word, rather than the whims and caprices of a group of people. The constitution should guide actions and judgment for justice to stand.
2. Joint account between the state and the local government should be abolished. The local government should be allowed financial autonomy. Autonomy will promote accountability, functionality, self – determination and motivation of local government system. This will enable them to plan, and implement policies in their different work areas and be able to satisfy the needs and of the communities under their catchment areas for sustainable improved livelihood and survival of the people in their communities.
3. People should summon enough willpower to challenge the ills of the society because power belongs to the people. They should question their own psychological stance of docility and put effort to revolutionize their mindsets towards challenging corruption and bad compromise to those in leadership

position. This is because the attitude of the people determines their development attitude and the underserved are the victims of corrupt practices. People should demand accountability from all those in leadership positions. This is particularly because the judiciary which use to be seen as the last hope of the common man seems to be currently at disparity with the will of the people. Capital punishment should be imposed on all those who go against the provision of the constitution and those who involve in large scale corruption at all levels of government particularly, in local government areas which are supposed to serve the interest of the people at the grassroots. Bottom top planning approach is the best approach for community development in order to meet the needs and aspirations of the people. This is possible only if the LGAs are allowed to function optimally.

Conclusion

The role of local government in community development in Nigeria is quite enormous and comprehensive. They are articulated in the interest and common good of the people in different communities. It is unfortunate that such meaningful development is being abused and derailed by the activities of unscrupulous citizens of the country, however, hope is not lost, with an envisioned trusted leadership who has the interest of the people at heart and conscientized followers who will revolutionize their mindset to demand good leadership and accountability from their leaders, the future will be brighter and communities better.

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