



Theoretical Exploration of Third Tier of Government and the Challenges of Democratic Governance in the Third World Nations - A Case Study of Nigeria

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Abstract:

This study examines the theoretical exploration of third tier of government and the challenges of democratic governance in the third world nation with a special emphasis on Nigeria politics.. Every third tier of government is expected to manifest the characteristic features of good governance such as: transparency, accountability, responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness, popular participation, service delivery etc Paradoxically, the reverse has always been the case due to multifarious challenges confronting democratic governance in the third world nations particularly Nigeria. The impacts of this have indeed been vested on the socio-political landscape of Nigeria as it has equally impeded the economic development of many areas. The development which has promoted social backwardness such as unemployment, corruption, greed among others. As a corollary, the much expected dividends of democratic governance is nothing but a ruse. The work relies on both primary and secondary sources of information. The data sources were supported with the administration of questionnaires and oral interview with relevant stakeholders and members of the public to elicit more information about the performance relevant to the study. Data were also sourced from the internet, governmental organizations and other related agencies with the objective of making the study more empirical in nature. The study raises critical question about the desirability of good governance and how it would attain corruption-free society and provide employment opportunity as far as Nigerian as a country is concerned. It noted that the aims of establishing the tier of government is yet to be fully realized rather it has been performing otherwise. The study therefore concludes that for the attainment of good governance, societal development, corruption free society and putting in the round peg in round hole, emphasis should be placed on making the third tier of government more viable.

Keywords: Third Tier of Government, Democratization Democratic Governance, Popular Participation

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The creation of local governments in Nigeria was deliberately designed to ensure maximum participation of citizens in the development process in order to promote balanced development so that the third tier of government will be more responsive to the developmental aspirations of local communities. Efficient and effective governance and creating a sense of belonging at the grassroots. Thus the local government system was designed to be a means for ensuring effective democracy at the grassroots level because it is the level of government that is very close to the people and by implication it is the engendering good democratic cultures and values, effective participation in the process of development.(Bashir and Muhammed, 2007). Unfortunately many observers believe that democracy in Nigeria has not thrived at the grassroots level (Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010; Omadia, 2009; Oviasuyi, 2010; Maurice and Adams, 2012)

Nigerians are aware of the recent local government Acts which set out a positive direction for the regulation of the local governments in Nigeria, but there is a school of thought who argues that in delivering the ambitions which the Federal

government has set out, it faces significant risks and challenges which need to be addressed if the aspirations of the rural people are to be met through the local government as most rural people are yet to benefit much from the dividends of present democratisation in the country. (Cited from Repositioning Local Government's As The Bedrock Of Service Delivery In Nigeria by Benjamin Ogbebulu)

Regardless of nomenclature, local government is a creation of British colonial rule in Nigeria. It has overtime experienced change in name, structure and composition. Between 1930s and 1940s, for instance, 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, 1982:20-21). 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 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 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, 2000:70)

The reforms also introduced population criterion under which a local government could be created. Consequently, a population of within 150,000 to 800,000 was considered feasible for a local government. This was done to avoid the creation of non-viable local council and for easy accessibility. There was provision for elective positions having the chairmen as executive head of local government with supervisory councilors constituting the cabinet. This was complemented by the bureaucrats and professionals, such as Doctors, Engineers, etc., who were charged with the responsibility of implementing policies (1976 Guidelines).

In 1991, a major landmark reform was introduced as the system had legislative arm. In addition, the Babangida administration increased the number of local government from 301 in 1976 to 453 in 1989 and 589 in 1991. The Abacha regime also increased the number to 774 local councils that we have today and the administrative structure also underwent some changes (Ajayi, 2000:71).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problems of local governments started through the funding of 774 local governments in Nigeria to address a range of different social needs such as adult social care for local rural elderly men & women, (pensioners), domestic waste and disposal to protect the environment.

Also, councils should provide health & maternity care centres for pregnant women, play centres for men. Local governments should be adequately funded to provide green parks & recreation centres for the local people, provision of libraries with up to date textbooks and be allowed to constitutionally, set up co-operatives banks to give loans to local people with free interests rates to farmers, craftsmen & women, petty traders and to those who wishes to start their small local business. Reputable banks should have their branches in all the local governments in the country to ease business transactions for the local people.

The major challenge that local government faces is the political control the respective state governor has on the local government chairmen. This is as a result of the fact that state governor sponsors election of most, if not all, of the chairmen. They are handpicked by the state governor rather than being elected. It is a clear case of who pays the piper dictates the tune. This again creates a problem of diversion of local government funds for personal use of state governor.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study shall attempt to answer the following questions:

- (i) What is third tier of government in Nigeria?
- (ii) To what extent has the democratization affected the nature and character of third tier of government in Nigeria?

- (iii) What are the challenges of democratization exercise in Nigerian Local Government Administration?
- (iv) Of what the relevance is democratization on grassroots governance?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are to:

- (i) Analyse the Nigeria third tier of government.
- (ii) Examine the nature and character of third tier of government in Nigeria.
- (iii) Access the nature of democratization exercise in Nigerian Local Government Administration.
- (iv) Highlight the impact of democratization on grassroots governance.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

The following are the basic assumption of the study:

- (i) That, the existence of third tier of government seems to impact on the nature of governance in any democratic settings.
- (ii) That, the nature and character of third tier of government and to promote good governance.
- (iii) That, the nature of democratization exercise determines the quality of the service delivery.
- (iv) That, the higher the degree of democratization, the greater the level of good governance at the grassroots level.

DEFINITION OF MAJOR TERMS

The following terms are defined as used in the study. Local Government, Democratization and Governance.

Local Government

The concept of local government involves a philosophical commitment to democratic participation in the governing process at the grassroots level. This implies legal and administrative decentralization of authority, power and personnel by a higher level of government to a community with a will of its own, performing specific functions as within the wider national framework. A local government is a government at the grassroots level of administration "meant for meeting peculiar grassroots need of the people (Agagu, 1997:18). It is defined as "government by the popularly elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place (Appadorai, 1975:287). The local government in seen as a victim of the lopsided federal arrangement (Ogubishi, 2007). He recalled that while councils were grappling with challenges of growth in the First Republic under the regional arrangement, their challenges multiplied under the military rule, despite the reforms introduced by successive administrations. "The constitution has not specified that the council is a third tier, unlike what we have in India and other countries. Here, it appears that they mere local agencies of the state administration for the purpose of interface with the countryside". Looking at the existence, performance and relevance of local government, Laski (1982:411) opines that, we cannot realise the full benefit of democratic government unless we begin by the admission that all problems are not central problems, and that the result of problems not central in their incidence requires decision at the

place, and by the person, where and whom the incidence is most deeply felt. Local government can also be defined as that tier of government closest to the people, "which is vested with certain powers to exercise control over the affairs of people in its domain" (Lawal, 2000:60). A local government is expected to play the role of promoting the democratic ideals of a society and co-ordinating development programme at the local level. It is also expected to serve as the basis of socio-economic development in the locality.

Democratization

Democratization is the process whereby a country adopts such a regime. There is less agreement among political scientists about how that process occurs, including the criteria to use in determining if democratization has, in fact, taken place. Many countries have adopted democratic regimes only to see them collapse in a military coup or other revolt that yields an authoritarian government instead. Typically, we do not think that democracy has truly taken root until at least three national elections have been held. Another criterion raised by many experts is the peaceful transfer of power from one political party or coalition to the former opposition. Such a transition is critical because it indicates that the major political forces in a country are prepared to settle their disputes without violence and to accept that they will all spend periods of time out of office. Less clear is how democratization occurs. It took an extended period of time to develop in the industrialized countries of Western Europe and North America. In the United States and Great Britain, it took well over a century before all the institutions and practices mentioned above were firmly in place. France, Germany, and Italy saw their democratic regimes collapse and are replaced by fascist ones. It is undoubtedly true that democratization can take place faster today. However, it certainly is not something that can be instituted overnight. Democratization takes time because it requires the development of new institutions and widespread trust in them, which almost never happens quickly. While some of the Greek city states and medieval Poland had regimes that had democratic aspects, modern democracy only dates from the late 18th century. To be considered democratic, a country must choose its leaders through fair and competitive elections, ensure basic civil liberties, and respect the rule of law. Some observers also claim that a democracy has to have a capitalist economy and a strong civil-society and civic culture, although not all political scientists would include these two criteria. Democratization is the transition to a more democratic system of government'. Historically, democratization has been kicked off by several factors. Higher wealth throughout the population gives more people economic equality, which often turns to a desire for political equality. Greater education, especially literate populations, are more likely to think, read, and write about their rights, and are more likely to encourage democratization. Healthy economies, lengthy periods of peace, good international relations, industrial technology, cultural values, and even the growth of a middle class have all been proposed to influence the move towards democratization.

Governance

Governance refers to "all of processes of governing, whether undertaken by a government, market or network, whether over a family, tribe, formal or informal organization or territory and whether through the laws, norms, power or language." It

relates to "the processes of interaction and decision-making among the actors involved in a collective problem that lead to the creation, reinforcement, or reproduction of social norms and institutions.

A variety of entities (known generically as governing bodies) can govern. The most formal is a government, a body whose sole responsibility and authority is to make binding decisions in a given geopolitical system (such as a state) by establishing laws. Other types of governing include an organization (such as a corporation recognized as a legal entity by a government), a socio-political group (chiefdom, tribe, family, religious denomination, etc.), or another, informal group of people. In business and outsourcing relationships, governance frameworks are built into relational contracts that foster long-term collaboration and innovation. Poor governance can lead to contract failure. This refers to the process of collective decision-making and policy implementation, (UNO, 2012). It is used to mean the act of governing relating to the impact of the legislative representativeness on the citizens. Notable scholars in this respect have defined "Governance" variously. Bowornwathana (2006:67) sees governance as involving the acceptance of certain democratic principles such as "popular participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, effectiveness and efficiency" Ayantayo (2012:4), defines governance "as the existence of economics, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanism, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences". Dell (2012: 202) defines governance as: "a mechanism for monitoring the actions, policies and decisions of corporations or government with the alignment of various interests among the stakeholders".

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Structural Functionalism

These theory adopted for this study is that of structural functionalism propounded Gabriel Almond and Powell (1966) which is a synonym for scientific analysis in general and as such has existed long before the adoption of the name "*structural functionalism*" in the social sciences. (Levy, 1968). According to Levy, the study of structure and function has a long history in the biological sciences. Structural functionalism analysis consists of nothing more than asking empirical questions in one of the following forms or some combination of them (Ibid): (a) what observable uniformities (or patterns) exist in the phenomenon under study? (b) what conditions result because of the phenomenon? (c) what processes occur as a result of the conditions? The first question asks: what structures are involved? The second asks: what functions have resulted because of the structures? Asked in opposite direction, different results could occur: what functions exist? What structures result from the functions etc (Ibid). A great variety of approaches have employed the terms "functional analysis" and "structural analysis" (Cansian, 1968; Merton, 1968). With their broad use in the social sciences there has been discussion of the appropriateness of the use of structure and function and the type of analysis associated with concepts (Levy, 1968). The functional approach is used more often than any other method in the study of western political

science (Susser, 1992). Therefore, the professional literature is full of references to the “functions” of political systems and to the relation between structure and function. (Ibid).Susser (1992) argues that although structural functionalism predated system theory, it still presupposes a “system” view of the political world. Similarities link functionalism to system analysis. Susser writes further that both (i.e system theory and structural functionalism) focus on input-output analysis, both see political systems as striving for homeostasis or equilibrium; and both consider feedback in their analysis (Ibid).

Functionalism’s history goes back to Aristotle’s study of ultimate causes in nature or of actions in relation to their end, or utility. (Lambeth, 1978). Developed in 17th century France, Montesquieu’s doctrine of separation of powers is based on the notion of functions that are best undertaken separate from each other as a means of ensuring stability and security (Ibid). Functionalism became important when Darwin’s evolutionary theories began to influence thinking about human behaviour. Darwin conceived of the idea of survival in functional terms. Each function was important to the survival of the whole system. System that could not adapt their functions ceased to exist. (Ibid).Corroborating Darwin’s postulation on structural functionalism, Susser (1992) indicates that the analogy of human social life is organic, not mechanical. Mechanical analogies imply a certain “looseness of association” (Ibid:p 203) between the parts. Susser contends that while the parts of a motor function as a unit, some parts can be easily removed and replaced, making their union less essential and the ability to exist autonomously less likely. In the organic analogy according to Susser (1992), “individual elements depend on the whole for their maintenance”. Functionalists tend to view social and political units in more holistic, organic terms. “Social practices are said to have a functional role in sustaining the system as a whole”. (Ibid, 204)

In conclusion, structural functionalism may be in decline as a methodological approach for the study of politics; however, it leaves a set of terms that are still used in political jargon. (Mitchell, 1968).

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

Third tier of government is an important institution in democratic setting. The study of this institution is justified to the extent that it will enhance deep knowledge on its activities to societal development and citizens’ freedom in Nigeria. Apart from this, the study will be beneficial to scholars and researchers in areas of democracy, good governance as it will enhance their understanding and broaden their knowledge on the relevance of third tier of government and the challenges of democratization in Nigeria. The public, scholars, federal, state government and the citizens will find the work useful as it will provide impetus and new insights towards the dynamics of third tier of government and a way of resolving the challenges facing democracy in promoting good governance in the country.

METHODOLOGY

Source of Data Collection

The study is in the Impact of solving the challenges of democratization in local government administration in Nigeria. But due to the fact that there are many local governments in Nigeria, I decided to randomly pick the most

influenced challenges throughout the third tier of government. This study adopts secondary sources of data collection.

Method of Data Collection

The study was drawn from secondary sources such as journals, internet and papers online. The essence of this is for the study to cover a limited spectrum of the local government areas in getting eliciting required information for the study.

Analysis of Data Collection

Data collected from the above was analyzed by using simple percentage. Simple percentage provides adequate way of analysing the simpler two-option questionnaire items.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study is limited to the geographical frontiers of Nigeria with a view to reviewing the challenges of democratization on Nigeria’s third tier of government.

LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

The challenges encountered are; this is because the work requires collection of secondary data that served as second party information through the use of online research, searching for books in the library, looking for relevant journals and newspapers. Obtaining information of this nature may pose some limitations from the internet problems of network and so on. Also, due to the nature of the programme, getting access to useful books in the library not easy.

SEGMENTS OF THE STUDY

This study is structured into the following segments: Background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, basic assumptions, justification for the study, scope of the study, definition of terms, theoretical framework, methodology, limitation to the study, and conceptual clarification

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

There is need to clarify the concept of Local Government here.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Conceptualizing third tiers of government, like others in the social sciences, is not easy; it is difficult to have a universally acceptable definition for this concept in developing and developed countries of the world. Consequently, Ovwsa (1995) has opined that the meaning attached to local government varies from country to country and, more frequently, it has become the purpose for which local government is created. However, the concept of local government involves a philosophical commitment to democratic participation in the governing process at the grassroots level. This implies legal and administrative decentralization of authority, power and personnel by a higher level of government to a community with a will of its own, performing specific functions as within the wider national framework. A local government is, at the grassroots level of administration, meant for meeting the peculiar needs of the people (Agagu, 1997:18). Appadorai (1975:287) sees local government as government by the popularly elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place. Third tier of government or grassroots government may be defined as having been established by law to perform specific functions within defined areas. A complex nation like Nigeria,

with its many ethnic groups within a divergent and diverse culture, requires a high degree of decentralization, which they accomplish by creating local government authorities. Looking at the existence and relevance of local government, Ayo (2005) believes that local government is a territorial non-sovereign community possessing the right level of necessary organization to regulate its own affairs. Local government can be viewed as a legal personality with sufficient but limited powers of control over its staff, finances and funds (Amao, 2002). Arising from our observation above, many definitions of local government have been suggested by different authors. As Ovwasa (2004) analyzed elsewhere, local government has been defined as a subdivision of a nation (unitary country) and state (federal system) which has substantial authority to extract labour and impose tax over its jurisdiction. The council of such third tiers of government is constituted by law, and membership is either elected or selected. Ovwasa summarized the definitions of local government with the following observations: third tiers of government is created by law. It has a representative government. It is a lower level of government and it has a legal personality with the power to impose taxes in its areas of jurisdiction or competence, but with limited autonomy. Local governments, at least in principle, deal with grassroots politics, i.e. keeping law and order, basic sanitation, constructing and maintaining local roads, supplying water, administering local schools, providing skill training and employment for residents, et cetera. However, community development is the process or effort of building communities on a local level with emphasis on building the economy, forging and strengthening social ties, and developing the non-profit sector. These are aimed at improving the quality of life of the people in the community. Are local government administrators in Nigeria performing their functions? If not, what are the obstacles? Before we delve into the problems of local government, let us attempt to look at its evolution in order to foster our understanding of the salient issues. Local government can also be viewed from two perspectives: As a process, local government refers to that organization which promotes the welfare and well-being of the people at the grassroots. To Bello-Iman (1996) local government refers to "that unit of administration with defined territory and powers as well as administrative authority with relative autonomy". This definition emphasizes the structural autonomy of local government in the areas of power and authority. It underscores the fact that local government in the context of the country's federal system is not a subordinate unit of the state ' and federal governments. This clarification becomes necessary because the United Nations, following the practice of local government systems in some unitary states, defines local government as: 'A political sub-division of a nation (or, in a federal system) a state which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the power to impose taxes, or exact labour for prescribed purposes.' The governing body of such an entity is either elected or locally selected (Awotokun, 1996). We can deduce from the above assertions that what distinguishes local government from local government is what they enjoys in carrying out its activities. Such autonomy would reflect the degree of powers, functions and resources at its disposal subject, of course, to the test of reasonableness. To drive home the commitment of the state to a true local government system, the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria at Section 7 enthuse that: "The

system of local government by democratically elected local government councils is under this constitution guaranteed, and accordingly, the government of every state shall, subject to section 8 of this constitution, ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions, of such councils" (The 1999 Constitution).

In conclusion, given these landmark innovations brought about by the 1999 constitution, what does the score-card says on the performance of local government councils in Nigeria? One would say, it has been less than satisfactory. One of the major aspects of these reforms is to bring democracy to this tier of government. This explains why there have been successive local government reforms.

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