

## Nigerian Local Government System and Effective Manpower Planning: A Reappraisal

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### Abstract

Local governments in Nigeria perform below substandard level. In most local government areas in Nigeria there is general poverty, unhealthy sanitary conditions, poor health care, infant mortality and insecurity. Local governments have abandoned their primary role of being the vehicle for effective rural development in Nigeria. Three main resources are imperative in the survival of every organisation – financial, material and human resources. The findings of this study reveal that local governments in Nigeria have fairly adequate financial and material resources to perform optimally and effectively. However, they lack the human resources to manage the other available resources for effective performance. Consequently, a reappraisal of the Nigerian local government system was undertaken to highlight the importance of effective manpower planning as a panacea to the problems of different magnitudes that have whittled down the performances of this level of government in Nigeria in the recent times.

**Key Words:** *Local Government, Manpower Planning, Performance & Local Government Service Commission.*

### Introduction

Every organization needs three main resources to survive. These are financial, material, and human resources. An organization needs money to pay its staff and to buy the essential materials or equipment for operation. The kind of materials needed is determined by the nature of the organization. Maximum production of services offered cannot be achieved unless the essential material resources are available. Of course, there is no organization without human resources. Even if an organization has got all the money and the materials it needs, it must still find capable people to put them into effective use. It is, therefore, safe to claim that human resources are about the most important of the three essential resources of an organization. It is equally true to say that human resources are the highest asset of any organization, because no matter the amount of capital invested in an organization, its success or failure depends on the quality of people who plan and execute its programme (Nwankwo, 2000:1).

Most of the early writings about people as a resource were done by economists concerned with the well-being of a nation. Since the 1960s many managers in business concerns and writers on business matters have expressed the view that the most important resource of the firm is not money or physical equipment but its employees.

In recent times writers and managers of organizations have come to agree that every organization must train and develop its human resources if it wants to survive. It



has been assumed that organizations have a life cycle of growth, a short period of stagnation, then a long period of decline. To avoid the decline stage, organizations must continue to grow. One obvious way of doing this is to develop the skills and abilities of employees. This work examines the importance of effective manpower planning in organization with particular reference to the Nigerian local government system.

### **Conceptual Explanation of Manpower Planning**

#### ***What is Manpower Planning?***

*Manpower planning* is concerned with budgeting for the most effective use of an organization's labour resources. Manpower planning has been described as "the process by which an organization ensures that it has the right number of people and the right kind of people, in the right places, at the right time, doing the right things, to serve the purposes of the organization" (Chandler & Piano, 1982:263). It may also be described as an attempt to forecast how many and what kind of employees will be required in the future, and to what extent this demand will be met (Graham, 1980:121). Similarly, Bowey describes the concept as "the activity of management which is aimed at coordinating the requirements from, and the availability of, different types of employees. Usually this involves ensuring that the firm has enough of the right kind of labour at such times as it is needed. It may also involves adjusting the requirements to the available supply" (Bowey, 1974:1).

Every organization plans its manpower needs just as it budgets the amount of money it needs to spend. Those organizations (private or public) which do not have well-established personnel departments or planning units in the administration fall into the error of looking for staff when necessary. All organizations determine their manpower needs either on a short-term (one yearly) basis or on a long-term (from two years to ten) basis.

However, for most organizations long-term manpower planning rarely exceeds five years. Short-term planning is a yearly adjustment of the figures on the current payroll, which goes with the ritual annual budgeting in organizations. Manpower planning is important for the growth of any organization and should be made part of organizational planning. In most organizations that undertake comprehensive manpower planning, the personnel department is made responsible not only for preparing the plans when there is no special planning unit but also for assisting the other departments in their use of them (Dunn & Stephens, 1972:2).

### **The Local Government System and Manpower Development in Nigeria**

Manpower Planning and development for the local government system in Nigeria are done by a galaxy of discreet institutions such as:

The State and Local Government Affairs Department, Abuja;

The State Deputy Governor's Office;

The Bureau for Local Government Affairs;

Ministries of Local Government;

Local Government Service Commission;

Local Government Council Chairman;

Directors of Local Government and Heads of Service; and  
Directors of Personnel Management (DPM).

General policies on the conditions of service of local government employees are made by the states and local government affairs department and the meeting of the key functionaries in charge of local government (Okoli, 2000:42).

The interpretation and implementation of these conditions of service are left to the various local government service commissions and the directors of local government and heads of service in the various local governments where they exist. The relationships between the various bureaus for local government on the one hand, and the local government service commissions and the directors of local government and heads of service on the other are not clearly spelt out (Okoli, 1977:13). Moreover, the relationships between the executive chairmen of local governments and the personnel departments in their local government, as regards senior cadres of local government employees, are anything but obvious. Even in the case of junior cadres, the exact role relationships between the executive chairman and top member(s) of the personnel departments of the local government are not clear-cut.

For purposes of illustration, let us briefly discuss the roles of the local government service commission, the executive chairman of the local government council, and the director of local government and head of service in manpower planning and development at the local government level.

#### **Local Government Service Commission**

The local government service commission is charged with responsibility for personnel matters in the local government system. It decides on the general trends in manpower development, based on feedback from the various local governments. Its responsibility covers both senior and junior staff. It decides on recruitment, training, development, and general staff development. In the exercise of these functions, it engages in both short-term and long-term assessment of staff requirements and supply. Unfortunately, it cannot decide on the critical determinant of staff development strategy, which revolves around finance. Apart from the 1 percent training fund, the commission lacks the much-needed funds to follow logically and conclusively manpower development plans. The result is that, in most cases, some local governments may need staff in certain cadres, yet the commission may be unable to assist because of shortage of funds.

#### **Chairman of the Local Government Council**

The chairman of the local government council exercises delegated powers of the local government service commission in respect of officers on grade levels 01 to 06. In the present political dispensation, the local government chairmen, primarily to score political points, sometimes to the detriment of local government administration, exercise this delegated authority with unmitigated relish and incredible enthusiasm. Local government service becomes a dumping ground for political associates, thugs, friends, and relations of the chairmen. Under the circumstances, manpower planning becomes an irritating encumbrance which must be eliminated. Consequently, whether or not vacancies or needs exist for more staff the chairman still proceeds to recruit.



### **Director of Local Government and Head of Service**

Theoretically, personnel matters, including manpower planning at the local government level, fall within the purview of the director of local government and head of service. It is his/her duty to send information on staff recruitments to the local government service commission based on returns from the director of personnel management. These returns are in turn compiled from submissions and requests from the various heads of department. As the chairman of the senior staff management committee responsible for all personnel activities affecting local government staff on grade levels 07 and above, the director of local government and head of service is centrally positioned in the development of manpower planning of the local government.

Unfortunately, in practice, he/she is emasculated by the overbearing political manipulations of the local government chairman, local political party officials and thugs, political office holders at all levels of government, and the administrative inertia of the local government service commission. The result is that the director of local government and head of service is neither the director nor the head of any service, as he/she watches helplessly while his/her office is inundated with staff of all categories, most of whom are not only redundant but constitute themselves into a cog in the administrative machinery of the local government.

### **The Importance of Adequate Manpower Planning**

The importance of manpower resources planning to organizations cannot be overemphasized. For instance, it will enable organizations to keep accurate and detailed personnel records, rather than forecast intuitively (Obi, 2002:53). It will also permit manpower planners to monitor the action rates in various departments of the local government. Such vital records/data can provide information for recruitment and hiring as well as clues about morale of employees. These information and clues could be useful to local government human resources planners. Also, adequate manpower planning is important because it will not only help organizations to use their manpower resources optimally but also to ensure that organization's manpower resources can meet up with the demands of the prevailing socio-economic, political and technological changes at all times. Finally, adequate manpower resources planning is very important in order to prevent severe budget crises, because, if this situation arises, the only option usually left for management is retrenchment of large number of employees, or induce voluntary retirement by offering financial incentives. Alternatively, management could freeze employment or combine all the alternatives highlighted above. It is, therefore, necessary to plan manpower resources in such a way to avoid all adverse consequences.

However, as it concerns the local government system in Nigeria specifically, effective manpower planning is necessary because it will assist the local governments in the following ways to: obtain and retain the quantity and quality of manpower needed for effective use; ensure the optimal use of human resources currently employed, through training and career planning; avoid waste by eliminating redundancies; provide for the future manpower needs of the organization in terms of needed skills, experience, locations, numbers, ages and sex; establish and recognize future job requirements; be better prepared to cope with the human problems associated with increases or decreases in manpower; enable the local government commission to identify areas where a shortage



or excess of manpower will likely occur in the future and to take advantage of the impending situation.

The achievement of the purposes, aims, or objectives of the local government system depends to a large extent on the quality of personnel employed in it. According to a United Nation's publication, "lack of systematic personnel planning has in many cases given rise to duplication of work. In most developing countries, it has resulted in an increase in pressure of work at certain levels in administrative hierarchy" (UN, 1982:30).

### **Conclusion**

In every area of development, human resources play an indispensable role. Badly managed, the human resources of an organization can limit their progress in every direction. If the human resources are effectively managed and planned, their knowledge, powers, skills, and competence can lead to available social and economic progress. In short, manpower resource is a product of an organization's life – its quality or its inferior nature.

Manpower is a critical resource although its significance is not always recognized in organizations. An organization with inadequate manpower, even when it has other limitless resources, will remain a poor and unprogressive organization so long as the bulk of its staff remain illiterate, and, has people with no saleable skills and competence to harness the organization's financial and material resources for effective and efficient performance.

It is also important to note that development includes the development of the right attitude to work. There is an urgent need in Nigerian local government system to improve workers' attitude to work with a view to enhancing productivity. There should also be propaganda campaigns to enhance the status of certain professionals, such as technicians and craft workers that are looked down upon in spite of their importance.

The message and advice for the Local Government Councils is that strategic manpower planning and development is the bedrock for effective and efficient performances of the various councils in Nigeria. As the popular saying goes, "He who fails to plan, has planned to fail." Similarly, either the commission plans to "survive and grow", or alternatively fails to "plan and perish." Just like the saying goes, "If you say that education is expensive, you may try ignorance and find it more expensive."

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