

Local Government System and the Escalation of Insecurity in Nigeria

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Abstract

The local government system is very crucial in the development of rural areas and can tackle the growing level of insecurity in Nigeria if allow to function properly. This paper is very timely considering the role the local government system plays at the rural areas which include: sustenance of the rural-economy, human capital development, participatory governance, provision of infrastructure and empowerment of the rural people. A firm function of the local government system is an asset to the Nigerian society. In recent times, insecurity has escalated beyond human proportion and the government is investing huge resources to clamp down on people who are deem threat to security from all the geo-political zones. This paper seeks to inform the Federal Government that more should be done on the functionality system of the third tier of government by propelling it to run on full blown autonomy without interference by the state governments. That, if the local government functions at full capacity, rural people will be empowered, rural-urban migration curbed, enhancement of the local economy, provision of both direct and indirect jobs for the youths, thus they will not be given to crime which triggers insecurity or use as political thugs easily during elections. This article ventured into the effects of insecurity to rural areas, the restoration of the local government system, proper check of allocations of local governments by Economic and Financial Crimes Commission(EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and proper recommendations made for the full blown restoration of the local government system, in order to curtail the rise of insecurity.

Key words: Local Government System, Insecurity, Development, Rural Areas. Nigeria

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Introduction

The local government system plays critical and commendable role in the accelerated development of rural areas in Nigeria. The reason why local government was created in 1976 was basically to bring government and development to the bulk of the people who reside in the rural areas. For Oyedele *et al* (2017), the Local Government constitute the most critical level of government in the move for sustainable national development. For many years, national development has been canvassed to take off from the grassroots as the local government is widely known as a vital instrument for rural transformation and machinery for effective delivery of socio-economic services to the people (Adeline: 2014, Otoghile and Edigin, 2011). The importance of this tier of government in Nigeria cannot be overemphasize as any attempt to derail the initial intention for the establishment of local government, there is going to be underdevelopment and other social problems at the rural areas which will trigger in urban towns and plunged the economy.

It is crystal clear that, more than seventy percent of Nigerians are residents of rural communities in Nigeria, thus the need why local government system should perform and function at optimum capacity without any encroachment by other tiers of government in the country. There is no way the industries and the people in urban centers can thrive without the enhancement of rural development whose mandate for development falls within the purview of local government. Just like the federal and state government have full-fledged executive rights to exercise their constitutional responsibilities, likewise local government in Nigeria is constitutionally empowered to operate a legitimate government that would have positive impact on the people including human capital development in the areas of job creation, scholarship for indigent students, economic empowerment, provision of infrastructural development and creating conducive atmosphere where public and private investments can thrive and make life meaningful at the rural communities.

Since the return of democracy in the 4th Republic in 1999, the local government system has been neglected by the federal and state governments through the Joint Account System where local governments is now at the mercy of states. According to Ojougbeli and Ojoh (2014), analyzed that, the implementation of the Joint Account was abused and became problematic as various state governments turned local government into money making venture. They further stated that, this attitude became pathological as local government productivity and performance lowered tremendously. Productivity and performance are its lowest ebb and the system cannot carry out the mandate as a functional third tier of government in terms of economic and physical development, thus the escalation of insecurity in rural areas in Nigeria. It is on record in Nigeria that herdsmen and farmers clash emanated from rural communities in northern part of Nigeria where local governments are helpless to use the government resources to quell bloody crisis before the intervention of State and Federal Government. A study conducted by Adekola and Enyiche (2017) on the effects of insecurity on community development projects in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni and Ahoada East Local Government Areas of River State, Nigeria, discovered that the causes of insecurity in the area of study were cult crises, conflicting political factions, poor distribution of resources, violent resistance to exploitation by government and corporate organizations and neglect of the people. These security issues which is responsible for nefarious activities are caused by the belittling of the local government system in Nigeria. While herdsmen attacks on communities are common in rural areas in northern Nigeria, communal clashes are at its peak in Southern part of Nigeria. Often times when communal crisis occur, the local government that is the closet government to the people is always helpless because resources that would have been mobilized and motivation to the Law Enforcement Agents are intercepted by state governments through the Joint Account. It is notable that for decades some states in Nigeria have not conducted local government election that can comfortably usher in full-fledged government while the states that have conducted elections are not allowing monthly allocations from the Federation Account to get to the local governments. Other states prefer to operate Care Taker Committee to run the activities of local government, thereby impeding and departing from the true existence of local government administration.

In the place where insecurity abound, no meaningful development can succeed, this was buttressed by Imhabekhai (2009), when he portends that no meaningful development activities can progress in a crises prone domain. The essence of this paper is to see how the glory of the local government can be resorted and become a panacea for stemming the tide of the growing insecurity problems in Nigeria through the monthly allocated revenue and the Internally Generated Revenue (IGR).

The article is organized in the following pattern, literature review, theoretical framework, neglect of local government system in Nigeria, insecurity in Nigeria and its effects, restoring the local government system and recommendations.

Literature Review

Local Government is created by law as the third tier of government that is closer to the people and to further development in rural communities. Ikelegbe (2005), see local government as a part of the constituents, state or origin of a nation state established by law to provide public services and control public affairs within its jurisdiction. For Fajobi (2010), Local government is responsible for the provision of law and order based on the range of social amenities and to encourage cooperation and participation of people and to ensure living conditions are enhanced with good life. United Nation Development Program (2009), viewed local government system as a unit of government covering the range of governance issues that exist at the local level including decentralization of policies and processes, the role and interrelationship of different actors and institutions, local democracy and local performance. The functions of local government is quite visible which is governance at the local level which include securing the people using state resources and human capital development in order to curb joblessness, social depression and violent activities as a result of neglect of the local government system. In the event of security issues, development cannot thrive in rural communities and there is the tendency for a spill over in urban centers as a result of migration. Adekola and Garba (2015), posits that the socio-political and economic landscape of Nigeria is bedeviled with endemic evil of crime and violence. This he said was caused by successive administration in Nigeria to address challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequitable distribution of wealth among ethnic nationalities, ultimately responsible for violent attacks, anger, agitation against Nigerian state by individuals and groups.

Insecurity is a bane to national development. Denney (2013), observed that the relationship between insecurity and underdevelopment is much stronger than relationship between peace and development. This expression was shared by Dike (2013), when he related the lack of security of lives and property of citizens is a major hindrance to meaningful development. In an atmosphere of "induced" fear caused by neglect of local government system which propel violence and insecurity is bound to discourage local and foreign interests to carryout development projects and this is capable of affecting the people negatively in the aspect of jobs and comfortable living. Nigeria is reputed to be the largest Black African Country in terms of population and there is the need to provide for the people through good governance at the three tiers of government. Any attempt for misgovernance at any level, the present state of insecurity will snowball into helpless situation where international assistance will be needed. This is the reason for this paper whose interests is to restore a functional local government system and to stem the tide of insecurity in the country.

Theoretical framework

The theory that is used to explain the article is the development school. This theory is a combination of the democratic and efficiency theories which urged on how local government should function for the benefit of the people and their participation in governance, rendering of services and jobs availability. The basis of this theory is that local government serves as an agent of development of the rural people particularly in the third world countries. The improvement of the quality of life and standard of living of the local population becomes a responsibility of the local government (Abayomi, 2011). It is the responsibility of the local government to use her resources with the state government in the aspect of security, infrastructural development and creating a conducive atmosphere for local economy to thrive. By this, insecurity can be checked and curtailed appropriately. The local government being the closest level of government to the people, it poses to be in the best interest of been aware and acquainted with the needs of the local population (Salah, et al, 2011).

Therefore, if the local government keep to the tenets of its establishment, the issue of insecurity which is a social problem can be eliminated or minimized with all resentful alacrity.

Neglect of local government system in Nigeria

There is no gainsaying that the local government system has been neglected for more than a decade, thus the escalation of socio-problems like communal crises, clashes between herders and farmers, religious crises, kidnapping, armed robbery, cultism and other violent crime are on the increase in the local governments. According to Oji, Eme and Nwoba (2014), communal conflict constitutes one of the major recurring problems affecting the socio-political landscape of Africa. One of the manners at which the local government was neglected by the Federal and State government was through the Joint Account system which has the backup of the Nigerian Constitution In Section 162 (5) of the constitution, provides inter-alia “the amount standing to the credit of local government council in the Federal Account shall also be allocated to the state for the benefit of their local government councils on such terms and in such manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly”. Also section 162 (6) provides as follows, “Each State shall be paid all allocations to the Local Government Councils of the State from the Federation Account and from the government of the state”. In the view of Ojugbeli and Ojoh (2014), state governments abused to Joint Account System, rather they see the account as a goldmine for themselves through various illegal deductions, diversion and delay of the statutory allocations of the council. Apart from the Joint Account which bastardized the local government system and plunged the council into serious economic doldrums, the Governors became emperor and killed democracy at the local government level by not conducting elections, rather constituting care-taker committees or where elections are conducted stooges who are loyal to the governors are planted into office.

This really affected the local government system and impeded the very reasons why local government was established. Life in rural areas is harsh, joblessness is visible, crime rate is high and rural-urban migration became inevitable. The neglect of local government system escalated the security problems because when crime is committed at the local level, the first point of call is the local government. In the event where the council areas do not have democratic structures, where there is no backup financial power, these are the reasons why the system is helpless in quelling crime and issues that border on insecurity.

Another way by which the tenets of the local government system was neglected was the formation of care-taker committee which is very illegal to the foundation of local government affairs. The members of the committee are often stooges of the State Governors and used to rig election at the local government level. The tenure of the local government chairman is often determined by the various State Houses of Assembly through the “initiatives” of the Governors. This shows how the system lack the requisite autonomy since state governors in the various state would ensure that the people who win are those who belong to the same political party against the wishes of the people, thus the very reason why the third tier of government is ineffective in driving the required development rather escalates underdevelopment, poverty and high crime rate. For Eboh and Diejomach (2010) and Ajibulu (2012) the undue interference by state governors have rendered the local government as an appendage of the state government, thereby reducing the local government to the position of a Ministry under the State government.

Effect of insecurity in rural areas in Nigeria

It is no longer news that insecurity has reached its peak in Nigeria, considering the number of persons that lost their lives on daily basis. This is a clear indication of the total neglect of the local government system. Kidnapping now takes place in rural Nigeria, when the jobless youths who are into kidnapping discovered that parents whose children are rich are in the villages, they are prone to kidnapping. The former Minister of Finance, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iwela’s mother was kidnapped in a village in Delta State. The father of the prolific writer, Chimmanda Adichie was kidnapped in the village in Anambra State. The father of Mikel Obi was a victim of kidnapping in the village and

former Nigerian Football Coach, Sampson Siasia's mother was also kidnapped in the village in Bayelsa State. As a result of increase kidnapping in rural communities, young men and women termed to take their parents to the cities where they reside, still the city is not safe as kidnapping is more rampant in urban towns. Other crimes in the village include cult crises, ritual killings, armed robbery, banditry and political violence. These crimes have been on the rise on daily basis. Hardly a day passes without report in the media of heinous crimes in rural areas.

The effect is that the local economy has been crippled since those who engage in small scale businesses are target of criminality. Local investors in rural areas are finding it difficult to invest in rural areas. For instance, the banditry in Zamfara State where the Federal Government has to suspend all gold mining activities in the area was as a result of bandits attacking miners and villagers in the state. Politicians see readymade thugs in rural areas to hire during political contest. In Cross River State, buildup to the general election in 2019, PDP and APC supporters clashed in village in Etung Local Government Area resulting to the death of many youths. Similar tragic incidents occurred in other states across the country. Another effect of insecurity is that government at both Federal and State now enter into expensive negotiation, with people who commit crime by giving them huge amount of money in order for them to stop their atrocious acts. Amnesty is also a form of negotiation for criminals. The money spent for negotiation by government would have been used for infrastructural development or human capital development or other form of development that can make life meaningful for the rural people. To further state the effect of insecurity in the rural areas, the image of Nigeria at the global community is at stake, it placed Nigeria and Nigerians in bad light, thus the unfavorable treatment meted on Nigerians when they travel abroad.

Restoring the glory of the local government system in Nigeria

According to Nwodike (2016) in his paper titled *Corrupt Practices in Nigeria's Local Government: A crucial perspective*, recommended that the Joint Account for State and Local Government should be scrapped with immediate effect through a constitutional review. This was the position of Ojugbeli and Ojoh (2014) where their advice was the abolition of the Joint Account which has rendered Local Government Financially handicapped in rendering services that borders in development.

Since insecurity is now a national and socio-problem, the government of President Mohammedu Buhari should do everything possible in restoring the glory of the Local Government system in Nigeria. It is very clear that one of the party manifestoes of the All Progressive Congress (APC) is to empower the people of the grass root, this can be achieved through the instrumentality of restoring the hope of the people by allowing the Local Government to function with its constitutional mandate. The constitutional mandate: fully paid allocation directly to the local government, prompt conduct of local government election. EFCC and ICPC beaming searchlight on the funds of local government to ensure that money meant for the people are used for such purposes rather than shared among politicians which usually is the case and an excuse by State Governors to control the funds of the local government.

In the 21st Century, if Nigeria must meet up with wide spread development, the rural area must be a key factor and the immediate restoration of the local government system which will propel the platform for addressing the State of insecurity in rural Nigeria. If security is put in place, life can comfortably return to normalcy and impact on the rural economy which would positively affect the lives of the people. They would be a return of governance in this regards and the people can conveniently participate in governance. There will be a positive multiplier effect as migration to urban towns by young people in rural, area would naturally be checked.

Conclusion

The state of insecurity in Nigeria is quite worrisome and part of the cause is the neglect of the local government system which has massively contributed in the collapse of the local economy, collapse in the participation of agricultural development, joblessness and infrastructural decay and lack of human capital development. The crime and other security issues can be curtailed by full-fledged restoration of the local government system.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for the immediate restoration of the local government system in order to tackle the problem of insecurity in Nigeria;

1. There should be the scrapping of the State and Local Government Joint Account through a constitutional review.
2. Federal Government through the president should order for election to be conducted in all the local government in Nigeria.
3. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be responsible for the conduct of local government election in order to avoid State Governors from planting stooges who would do their bidding at the expense of the people.
4. Both Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) should conduct regular probe on local government funds to effect the lives of the people.
5. Finally, Chairmen, Councilors, Political appointees and Staff of Local Government should be trained and retrained on how the local government system is administered. This will go a long way in building the competence of those who run the local government for the benefits of the people.

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