

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN A CHANGING STATE ENVIRONMENT: THE EXAMPLE OF DELTA STATE NIGERIA**Mgbonyevi Voke Charles (PhD)****Department of Public Administration, University of Delta State Agbor, Nigeria**voke.mgbonyebi@unidel.edu.ng**ABSTRACT**

The article focuses on Administrative challenges at local government levels in relating with the states Government. The idea is to exhibit the nature and pattern of administrative challenge encounter by Delta State Government in relating with the 25 local government councils of the state. The article reveals that "relations are that of superior and subordinate, lopsided in favor of the state government. The relationship that exists between the two tiers of government is that of "Master who is always right and a servant fond of mistakes. The instruments of control identified are from the three organs of the state. These instruments of control eroded the autonomy of the local government councils and render them helpless in address local people peculiar needs. The paper therefore recommended for total autonomy of local government, eradicate duplication of function and increase manpower quality and quantity.

Keywords: Federalism, Inter-Governmental Relations, local Government Administration/ Autonomy.

Introduction

The definition of local government (LG) by the Nigerian Federal Government leaves one with no iota of doubt that it is largely both theoretically sound and service oriented to the people (Nigeria, 1976; Ikeanyibe and Nwankwo, 2020). It talks of representative councils with substantial control over local affairs for the provision of services and implementation of projects in their areas, to complement the activities of both the state and federal governments (Nigeria, 1976; Arowolo, 2019). The definition also amply recognizes the need for L.G autonomy as the substantial control of local governments (LGs) is aimed at staff, institutional and financial matters, among others (Nigeria, 1976; Ezeani, 2021). The three tiers of government in a federal state are that of partners in progress (Wheare, 1946; Adebayo, 2020). The major rationale always advocated by scholars is that, of bringing government closer to the people (Ikelegbe, 2005; Okafor, 2022). This relation of unequal status has become a nightmare to the last tiers of government (Duru et al., 2004; Ojo, 2021). The state government has manipulated the councils to that of superior/inferior status (Ikeanyibe and Ikeanyibe, 2009; Olowu, 2018). Only in few occasions that one could argue that relations of equal status exist (Arowolo, 2019). The control power exercised by the state Government Authorities over the local government appears to be extensive in Delta State, as well as other states in Nigeria (Delta State, 2006; Ezeani, 2021). Some state governors are of the opinion that control measures are necessary to guarantee a pattern of required service which otherwise might vary from one local government authority to another (Olowu, 2018; Adeyemi, 2020). Any check must to some extent reduce autonomy of local government authority (Ikelegbe, 2005; Okafor, 2022). The major concern here is the extent and forms that such control could be applied (Duru et al., 2004; Ezeani, 2021). They –believe that the principles of democracy which include decision making should be the principles under which local government administration is based (Wheare, 1946; Adebayo, 2020). The state governors attribute the inefficiency and failure of government (state) to the local government authorities and as such see local Government as the architect of their inabilities of providing social services (Olowu, 2018; Adeyemi, 2020). They are of the view that states are more competent and efficient compared to local government councils (Ezeani, 2021). According to Dr. Wilson Omene, "my Doctorate degree could not assist me in understanding the practical functions, power and limits placed on me as the chairman of Ethiopia West Local Government council" (Omene,

2010). That any time he seeks for legal advice from the council legal adviser, the adviser seems to be more confused, especially when the interest of the second tier of government is involved (Omene, 2010; Ikeanyibe and Nwankwo, 2020). The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria requires some regulatory measures which the state can employ for the smooth, efficient and effective implementation of Government policies and programmes (Nigeria, 1999; Arowolo, 2019). The constitution granted the three organs of government in the state to have considerable supervision over the local council (Nigeria, 1999; Ezeani, 2021).

Executive Instrument of Control

The state government through its ministries controls and supervises some aspects of the activities of local authorities (Ezeani, 2021; Adeyemi, 2020). There is no dispute that local government authorities are saddled with the responsibility of building schools and houses (Nigeria, 1976; Okafor, 2022). The local governments cannot single-handedly engage in such construction without approval from state government (Arowolo, 2019). The state ministry of land and survey and Urban and Regional Planning Board (URPB) must approve such site and plan before construction (Ezeani, 2021). The rationale behind this approval is to ensure that such buildings are necessary and standardized so that public funds are used judiciously (Adeyemi, 2020). The chief executive of the state can use commissioners to checkmate local government performance (Duru et al., 2004; Olowu, 2018). This process is known as "default control power" (Ezeani, 2021). If dissatisfied, the governor may require explanations within a specified period (Arowolo, 2019). Failure may lead to withdrawal of powers and appointment of another body (Ezeani, 2021).

Another control area is school inspection by state ministries (Nigeria, 1999; Okafor, 2022). Commissioners also wield power through delegated legislation (Erero, 1998; Adeyemi, 2020). They make subsidiary legislation under statutory instruments (Ezeani, 2021). This helps councils meet legislative requirements (Arowolo, 2019). There are regular consultations between ministries and local authorities (Duru et al., 2004; Ikeanyibe and Nwankwo, 2020). Committee chairmen from state assemblies interact with local government officials (Ezeani, 2021). Delta State councils were politically aligned with the ruling party (Delta State, 2006). Their activities were seen as complementary (Olowu, 2018). However, relationships differ depending on policy issues (Adeyemi, 2020). In housing, the state plays a dominant role due to funding (Arowolo, 2019). Local governments play supplementary roles (Ezeani, 2021). In other services, the state plays a complementary role (Okafor, 2022). The state controls school infrastructure, while local governments manage daily operations (Nigeria, 1999; Adeyemi, 2020). Worried by poor performance despite autonomy, states increased involvement (Ikelegbe, 2005; Ezeani, 2021). States control budgets, grants, and loans (Duru et al., 2004; Okafor, 2022). Budgets must be approved by state governments (Arowolo, 2019). States can reject unrealistic projects (Adeyemi, 2020). Grants and loans serve as control instruments (Ezeani, 2021). States dictate how funds are used (Okafor, 2022). Financial memoranda guide fund usage (Duru et al., 2004).

Legislative Instrument of Control

The 1999 reforms provide for executive chairmen and legislative councilors (Nigeria, 1999; Arowolo, 2019). The legislative arm makes bye-laws (Ezeani, 2021). These bye-laws require state approval (Adeyemi, 2020). For example, suspension decisions require state ratification (Olowu, 2018).

Control Instrument of the Judiciary

Nigeria recognizes local government as a third tier (Erero, 1998; Ezeani, 2021). However, their powers are legally limited (Nigeria, 1999). Courts can declare actions ultra vires (Arowolo, 2019). States can sanction or dissolve councils and order fresh elections (Ezeani, 2021).

Conclusion

State control instruments are largely supervisory (Ezeani, 2021; Adeyemi, 2020). There is need to improve manpower capacity (Okafor, 2022). This will reduce criticisms of local government performance (Arowolo, 2019). Duplication of projects between state and local governments is problematic (Ezeani, 2021).

Recommendations

Inadequate autonomy remains a major challenge (Ikelegbe, 2005; Ezeani, 2021). Local governments should have substantial control (Nigeria, 1976; Okafor, 2022). State-level control agencies should be reviewed (Arowolo, 2019). Direct federal allocation is recommended (Adeyemi, 2020). Manpower development should be improved (Ezeani, 2021). Coordination should prevent duplication (Okafor, 2022). Full autonomy should be granted (Ikelegbe, 2005).

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