

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICE COMMISSION IN MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL

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Abstract

Before the advent of the colonial era, local communities had their own system of administration. It was organized by Village or Clan heads who met periodically to take decisions on the affairs of the community. The arrival of the British colonial government with the introduction of indirect rule system brought some levels of supervision into local administration, such that the villages heads and the clan heads, although autonomous leaders of their local communities, were under supervision. Today, these autonomous communities have been grouped under different Local Government Areas, with the Local Government Service Commission (LGSC) providing supervisory role. The development of the local communities therefore depends on the effectiveness and efficiency of the LGSC. This paper critically assessed the role of Local Government Service Commission in the development at the local government level. The paper adopted the secondary method of data collection, and relied on the 'New Public Management' theory (NPMT), for analysis. Given the emphasis of NPMT on good governance, institutional and organization restructuring, as well as service delivery, the paper concluded that the LGSC is bedeviled with series of problems, particularly corruption. There is therefore, the need to sanitize and strengthened the system to ensure development at the local government level.

Keywords: Civil Service, Civil Service Commission, Colonialism, Development, Local Government.

Abstrait

Avant l'avènement de l'ère coloniale, les communautés locales avaient leur propre système d'administration. Il était organisé par des chefs de village ou de clan qui se réunissaient périodiquement pour prendre des décisions sur les affaires de la communauté. L'arrivée du gouvernement colonial britannique avec l'instauration d'un système de gouvernement indirect a introduit un certain contrôle dans l'administration locale, de sorte que les chefs de village et les chefs de clan, bien que les chefs autonomes de leurs communautés locales, soient sous surveillance. Aujourd'hui, ces communautés autonomes ont été regroupées sous différentes zones de gouvernement local, la Commission de services pour les gouvernements locaux (LGSC) assurant le rôle de supervision. Le développement des communautés locales dépend donc de

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l'efficacité et de l'efficience du LGSC. Ce document a évalué de manière critique le rôle de la Commission de services pour les gouvernements locaux dans le développement au niveau des gouvernements locaux. Le document adopte la méthode secondaire de collecte des données et s'appuie sur la théorie du «nouveau management public» (NPMT) pour l'analyse. Compte tenu de l'accent mis par NPMT sur la bonne gouvernance, la restructuration des institutions et des organisations, ainsi que sur la prestation de services, le document conclut que le CSGL est confronté à une série de problèmes, notamment de corruption. Il est donc nécessaire d'assainir et de renforcer le système pour assurer le développement au niveau des gouvernements locaux.

Mots-clés: Fonction publique, Commission de la fonction publique, Colonialisme, Développement, Gouvernements locaux

Introduction

Many scholars at different times have given various definitions on the concept of local government, all focuses on the transfer of political powers to local areas by involving the people who live in a defined geographical area. According to Olisa et al (1990) in Opara (2016, p. 46) local government is a unit of government below the central, regional or state established by law to exercise political authority, through a representative council within a defined area. These powers give substantial control of local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to the Council, which initiates and directs the provision of services to determine and implement projects that complement activities of the federal and state governments in their areas. The implementation of the projects, which are often carried out through active participation of the people and their traditional institutions (local initiative) are seen as responses to local needs.

The guidelines of the 1976 local government reforms defined local government as government at the local level, exercised through representative councils, established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. The United Nations in 1961 also defined local government as a political sub-division of a state, constituted by law. Local government is the lowest level of government in a modern state. It is legally distinct as the third tier of government (Eneanya, 2009, p.123). Local government system is one of the most recent administrative reforms in the political programmes of the federal government of Nigeria. It is the administration under local committees to maintain law and order based on a range of social amenities and to encourage cooperation and participation of people at the grass root level to improve their living conditions.

The current trend of ineffectiveness of the local authorities is dual in nature, managerial and financial deficiencies. The setting up of state and local government joint account committee, local government service commission, ministry of local government and chieftaincy affairs and other allied agencies at the state level have made local government autonomy unattainable in Nigeria. Hence, this paper evaluates the role of local government service commission in manpower development at the local government level. This is meant to streamline the present tendency where both management staff and employees resort to arbitrary application of work methods that are not in consonant with the local government service commission procedures, if this is not checked through effective manpower training and development initiative and leadership potentials. The reasons for the establishment of local governments in Nigeria are stated by Eneanya (2009, p. 123) to include:

It provides the people with the platform to conduct their own affairs in line with local needs and customs; b) It provides a base for mobilizing the local people for community

development; c) Local government serves as a hedge against over-concentration of power at the centre which often leads to tyranny; d) It helps to promote grass roots democracy; e) It acts as a source of supply of leaders to state and national politics; and, f) It serves as a medium of communication with the local people and the state or central government

There are a number of factors that contribute to the success of any organization, these factors includes capital, equipment, and manpower development. All these factors are important but the most significant factor is the human factor. Since it is people that will put together the resources to work, it should be viewed as such by management in giving it due attention in order to achieve organizational goals and objectives. The essence of manpower planning is to ensure that the right person is available for the right job at the right time. Manpower development is a process of intellectual and emotional achievement through providing the means by which people can grow on their jobs. It relates to services of activities which an enterprise would embark upon to improve its managerial capacity. Manpower development is important in a discussion of strategic human resources management. The emphasis on manpower development is influenced by the belief that it is now desirable to focus more attention on areas which in the past has been relatively neglected because every organization regardless of its size must provide for the needs, interest and desire of its employee within the work environment, if it is to earn loyalty, dedication, involvement and commitment necessary to compete effectively.

It is pertinent to note that the success of any organization depends on the ability and expertise of those who operate it both at the managerial and lower levels of operation and such abilities and expertise usually stems from the knowledge that are possess and the quantum of training received. Therefore, the local government service commission has the constitutional function to monitor, evaluate and ensure that the functions of local government councils as enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), in the fourth schedule, section 7, are actualized for the transformational development of the local government areas.

Statement of the Problem

Local government administration in Nigeria has been bedeviled with several administrative and political challenges like poverty, gradual erosion of power and authority, corruption, shortage of skilled personnel, poor leadership, parochialism and partisan politics. As a result of these problems, the federal government decided to put in place some control measures to tackle the problems. One of these measures is the establishment of the Local Government Service Commission (LGSC). The roles played by the LGSC in the development at the local government level cannot be over-emphasized. The local government service commission is responsible for the training and retraining, and development of employees (personnel/ staff) in the local government level.

Many scholars at different levels have given various definitions on the concept of local government, all focusing on the transfer of political powers to local areas by involving the people who live within the definite geographical area. Local government therefore, is below the central, regional or state government; established by law to exercise political authority, through a representative council within a defined area. These powers give a substantial control over local affairs, the staff, and institutional and financial powers, to initiate and direct the provision of services to determine and implement projects that could complement the activities of the federal and state governments in their areas.

The realization of the objectives for setting up the different Local Government Areas is monitored by the LGSC. However, the LGSC is bedeviled with several challenges as stated above. While many local governments are overstaffed with large number of nonprofessional employees, others lack qualified staff in the required number to adequately carry out their functions. The LGSC that is tasked with the responsibility for the recruitment, employment, posting, training, promotion, and discipline of all local government personnel (USAID, 11-12) has not been carrying out those duties effectively.

Research Questions

In the course of this research work, a number of questions were prepared to guide the study. These include:

- a) What are the various strategies adopted by the local government service commission in ensuring development at the local government level?
- b) What are the problems faced by the local government service commission in an attempt to actualize her function or roles?
- c) How can these problems be solved?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study is to evaluate the performance of Local Government Service Commission, with emphasis on the extent to which it has achieved development at the local government level.

Significance of the Study

The study shall realign the practitioners to the actual functions of the Local Government Service Commission in developing manpower to manage sustainable development at the grassroot level. This shall entail a re-examination of the roles of the local government administration, as a tier of government tasked with ensuring the development of manpower at the grassroot level of governance.

In course of this, the study shall remain useful as it unravel the different theories and practice of developing manpower to meet the contemporary challenges, especially in this information and communication technology (ICT) era. Thus, this study shall be beneficial both old and new employees, as well as, management staff of local government; their duties and responsibilities, especially the need for high productivity in service delivery. It shall also be useful to research scholars and private and public agencies in manpower development as well as the general public interested in ensuring that local government system works in Nigeria.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study include:

1. assessing the roles of local government service commission in manpower development in Nigeria.
2. Examining the part played by the local government service commission in staff training employment, discipline of staff, transfer and retirement from service and general control, and
3. looking at the problems encountered in the development plans, and give viable suggestions for improvement.

Literature review

Reforms are all about making changes for the better as a result of correcting abuses on how best local governments can be administered. The history of local administration in Nigeria explained some reforms or changes introduced at the local level of governance from the pre-colonial, to colonial and the post-colonial period. For instance, the Eastern region had the local government reforms of 1955, 1958, and 1960. In the Western region, the 1952 and 1957 local government laws brought in some changes, which the sole administrators' regime of the military system of 1960 destabilizes. The major breakthrough in local administration is however linked with the reform of 1976. The reform was based on the need for national democratic system and decentralization of power efficiency in discharging services locally. The reforms were characterized by uniformity in local government administration in all the states of Nigeria.

The 1976 local government reforms ushered in the practice of giving statutory allocations to local governments, the use of local government representatives by eradicating regional administration. Another feature of the 1976 reforms was the introduction of full time chairman and supervising councilors at the local level. The reform also stimulated democratic participation at local level through the institution of popularly elected representatives to the local government councils (Aibieyi, 2008).

In 1991, the military government of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida introduced the separation of powers in the legislative councils thereby introducing the presidential system practiced in the federal and state governments to local governments. The improvement in democracy at the level led to eradication of the Local government service commission (LGSC) in Nigeria. In 1992 LGSC was reintroduced. Many other reforms have taken place between 1999 to date, such as politicization of the office of the local government secretary and the introduction of DG service and Administration as head of administration in the local government, the establishment of the office of the Auditor general to audit the accounts of local government councils Local government pensions and several others. All these reforms seek to strengthen the existence of local government and to improve on their performance. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, pp.: 150-151), Fourth Schedule, Section 7, stated clearly the constitutional responsibilities and functions of a local government council thus:

The consideration and the making of recommendations to a State commission on economic planning or any similar body on (i) The economic development of the State, particularly in so far as the areas of authority of the council and of the State are affected, and (ii) Proposals made by the said commission or body; Collection of rates, radio and television licenses; Establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds and homes for the destitute or infirm; Licensing of bicycles, trucks, (other than mechanically propelled trucks), canoes, wheelbarrows and carts; Establishments, maintenance and regulation of slaughter houses, slaughter slabs, markets, motor parks and public conveniences; Construction and maintenance of roads, streets, street lights, drains and other public highways, parks, gardens, open spaces, or such public facilities as may be prescribed from time to time by the House of Assembly of a State; Naming of roads and streets and numbering of houses; Provision and maintenance of public conveniences, sewage and refuse disposal; Registration of all births, deaths and marriages; Assessment of privately owned houses or tenements for the purpose of levying such rates as maybe prescribed by the House of Assembly of a State; and Control and registration of – Out-door advertising and hoarding; Movement and keeping of pets of all description; Shops and kiosks; Restaurants, bakeries and other

places for sale of food to the public; Laundries; and Licensing, regulation and control of the sale of liquor.

In addition to the above, the functions of the Constitution extended the Local government council to include participation in the Government of a State with respect to the provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education; The development of agriculture and natural resources, other than the exploitation of minerals; The provision and maintenance of health services; and Such other functions as may be conferred on a local government council by the House of Assembly of a State.

According to De Tocqueville quoted in Bhagwan and Bhushan (2012, p. 603):

Local assembly of citizens constitutes the strength of free peoples. Town meetings are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they bring it within the peoples' reach. They teach men how to use and enjoy it. A nation may establish a system of free government but without the spirit of municipal institutions, it cannot have the spirit of liberty

De Tocqueville's contention as quoted in the above quotation is correct. The local bodies constitute the foundations of grass root democracy. Hence in all top democracies of the world and also in the developing democracies, local institutions are encouraged and accorded due recognition. They constitute the edifice on which the democratic structure is built. In the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and France people take considerable pride in their respective local government. They have owned these institutions and have a sense of belongingness and participation. This has resulted in the strengthening of democratic base in these countries (Bhagwan & Bhusan, 2012, p. 605).

The Local Government Service Commission (LGSC) is the appointee of the State Government. The state governments use the commission to regulate local government policies. Since human activities are sometimes not devoid of problems, the LGSC is often faced with accusations of deploying incompetent calibre of staff to local government councils, thus resulting to poor implementation of democratic policies at the councils. Sometimes the local government service commission take over the political control of the councils. For instance in Delta state during the third republic, the heads of personnel management (HPMS) was mandated by the LGSC through the Delta House of Assembly to run the affairs of the councils. The effect is that democracy in local governments was crucified on the altar of LGSC and the state house of assembly.

In the instances such as the Delta State example above, it resulted to democratic deprivation of the local people in the state. Most state governments have taken over certain services of the local governments by excessive control of local government activities. The State Governments established the LGSC to help them appoint promote, transfer and terminate employees. Besides, there is the office of Adviser to government on political and local government matters. In contrast to the control exerted by the State Government including the control of accounts of the Local Government Councils, the 1976 reform guideline and 1979 constitution clearly established local government autonomy and independence in its relation with other tiers of government. However, experiences have shown over the years that the state government through complex of practices and interference meddle into the activities of local government service in areas like finance, appointments, etc. Most local politicians accuse the LGSC of excessive interference with the running of their respective local government units which, they claim is erosive of local government autonomy. They would prefer an independent Local Government as envisaged by the Constitution.

In Nigeria, 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). The interpretation and implementation of these conditions of service are left to the various LGSC 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 LGSC and the Directors of local government and heads of service, on the other hand are not clearly spelt out (Okoli, 1977). 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. Local government as a third tier of government in the country cannot recruit and maintain its staff. The authority to “hire” and “fire” is one of the determinants of organizational autonomy and maturity. Any organization that depends on another organization for its personnel can at best be described as an extension of that other organization that has control over them.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is situated within the ambit of the New Public Management theory (NPMT) propounded by Adamolekun and Kiragu (2002, pp: 160-161). The theory is tilted towards the transition from process and procedure to an arrangement that is workable, practicable and result-oriented. The theory places emphasis on good governance as a result of the recent globalization of the economy, technological innovation and democratization.

Globally, administrative reforms which are aimed at ‘best practices’ have three main features (Adamolekun & Kiragu, 2002, pp: 160-161). The first is the redefinition of the role of the state with a view to ensuring that it only performs functions that should be at the level of the state, while leaving the other functions to sub national governments and the private and voluntary sectors. Second, efficiency measures are introduced to enhance public management performance. The third feature is emphasis on measures for enhancing the accountability of the governors to the governed through increased transparency, openness and citizen participation.

As a conceptualization of the effective service, the NPMT is a relentless movement in the direction of greater transparency in resource allocation, decentralization of management authority and performance management through service quality. The theory therefore captures the basis of institutional and organization restructuring as an attempt to raise its performance by improving the quality of service delivery. It is result-focused rather than the process of result. The theory is concerned primarily with how to deliver public goods efficiently and equitably.

According to the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA, 2003, p. 8), it is a label used to describe a management culture that emphasizes the centrality of the citizen and customers, as well as accountability for result. It captures most of the structural, organizational and management changes taking place in the public sector of many organizations in the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. In terms of techniques, the “NPMT seeks to apply market principles to governmental administration with an emphasis on competition, contracting and customer orientation. It also emphasizes merit-based recruitment and promotion and increased autonomy for managers, i.e. (“letting managers manage”) with corresponding responsibility; performance related pay continuous skills development and upgrading” (Adamolekun, 2002, p.14).

The origin of the NPM can be traced to the general discontent with the traditional public administration, which has been perceived as grossly inefficient, wasteful, rigid and domineering. The call for a better and more focused public sector led to the birth of the NPM movement. Thus,

with the problems so defined, the paradigm extended to a belief that the public and private sectors did not have to be organized and managed in fundamentally different ways. Indeed, it would be better for the public services to be organized and managed as much as the private sector as possible (ECA, 2003, p.9).

The new public management (NPM), was an effort to improve government service delivery to the citizenry because of the expectations of the people. In many developing countries of Latin America and Africa, the new public management is seen as a paradigm shift from autocracy to democracy in the dawn of political pluralism. It is an avenue through which democratic governance will transform into a better governance, where public policies are technically efficient and effective and also responsive to the needs of large sections of the citizenry. The main current of the new public management literature is concerned not with what to do but how to do it better. It argues for an incentive environment in which leaders are given flexibility in the use of resources but held accountable for results. The emerging focus on client orientation and results-based accountability is encouraging civil service to innovate in many parts of the world. As a deviation from the principles of new public management, the civil service abysmal performance in Nigeria can be viewed and understood as a carryover effect of this deviation.

The new public management has captured vividly the reason for the ‘procedure without result’ of civil service operation in Nigeria. It can be said that various civil service reforms in Nigeria did not consider the option of new public management as alternative to excessiveness, therefore, policies were very good on paper but the implementation and workability remain a tall dream. The civil service in Nigeria is still being explainable using the ‘old bureaucracy’ that depends on degree of rigidity of rules, formal structuring and inefficiency, which inadvertently affect sustainable development at all levels of government in Nigeria.

Findings, Conclusion and Suggestions

Based on the reasons for the establishment of the Local Government Service Commission, a close evaluation of the activities of the local government councils in Nigeria, suggests that the local government administrative system have not been able to achieve their aims and objectives through the agency of the LGSC.

As the paper revealed, the Local government Councils in Nigeria are collectively seen as the third tier of government that supposed to be independent. But the activities of the LGSC, acting as a regulatory body of the state government, and the joint account of the Local Government and the state, have thwarted the operation of the Local government in many ways, including recruitment and training of staff, as well as reaching the people at the grassroot level which the Local governments were created to serve. Corruption at the LGSC is preventing the delivery of services to the people at the local government level.

Conclusion

The Local Government Service Commission is a major stakeholder as regards people’s management in local government administration in Nigeria. The ability of any organization, which the local government service commission is no exception, to achieve its goals and objectives depend largely on the caliber of its human resources and more importantly on how they are effectively managed. The efficient and effectiveness of the LGSC in guiding the local government to reach the local people with services is debatable.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this work, the author has suggested the followings:

1. There is need for further reforms to clear the confusion and intrigues in the control of the affairs of local government and its service commission;
2. The LGSC should be directly involved in the recruitment, promotion and discipline of junior staff in the commission. The staff of the commission should be well- versed in general administration and local government in particular so as not to be swayed by any idea from the political staff;
3. The commission should ensure proper in-service and external trainings of newly recruited, and old employees in order to improve their productivity. The trainings should expose the staff to issues of motivation, rewards, disciplinary procedures and recognition in order to reducing turnover of experienced staff.
4. The local government service commission should set up a tripartite (management staff, union and commission) panel to device strategies to detect and remove from the payroll ghost workers

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