

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Tunde ABIORO and Hammed Adetola ADEFESO

Faculty of Administration, Bafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Osun State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Local governments world over is saddled with the task of service delivery. It has so acquired this universally recognized responsibility owing to the fact that it is the government at the local level. To enhance growth and development, initiatives in the national development plan as enumerated by the central government need an effective implementation mechanism which local government is best placed to ensure. However, the tripartite objectives of sustainable development remain; economic, social and environmental. Notably, the challenge is of global dimension, thus, the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) strategy for implementation of the development initiatives by the government of Nigeria, which is also considered in this study. This paper emphasizes that the best way to secure sustainability of development strives is through local administration. The study draws on secondary source of data. It looked at the achievements, challenges and the successes recorded at the local level. The study concluded that for effective service delivery, mechanism for implementation must contain local initiatives.

Keywords: Local Government, Sustainable Development, National Development, Millennium Development Goals, (MDGs), Service Delivery, Implementation Mechanism

INTRODUCTION

The synergy between local development and enhanced national development is gaining currency; this is so because of the attention scholars have given to the study. Also, development strategies, efforts and programmes are more and more being designed to induce community participation towards ensuring growth and sustainable development. Thirlwall (1983) identified three main goals of development, viz; life sustenance, self esteem and freedom. Life sustenance is thus concerned with the provision of basic needs which will constitute the fulcrum of discussion in this study. The basic needs approach to development was however initiated by the World Bank in the 1970s (UNDP: 2006). It is safe therefore to concede that no country can be regarded as fully developed if it cannot provide her people with such basic necessities of life such as decent housing, clothing, food, health and minimal education, akin to Maslow's low order of needs.

With an increase in the performance expectations on governments' globally, local government by constitution can bring mass of citizens into intimate contact with the persons responsible for decisions and its executions. Arising from the above is that local government has become a necessary unit of development all over the world regardless of type, nature and character of the political system. Fundamentally, this study is geared towards advancing improved life and sustainability for the citizenry at local level through the millennium development initiatives. However, in the language of Igbuzor (2006: 4) it is necessary to engage in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for many reasons. First, the MDGs draw together in a single agenda, issues that require priority to address the development question. Second, the MDGs have received tremendous endorsement by world's governments. Third, the MDGs have the advantage of being more or less measureable, few in number, concentrated on human development and focused almost on a single date - 2015. Four, it adds urgency and transparency to international development and finally, explicit resource commitments have been made to achieve the goals.

Conversely, the concept of sustainable development raises the issue of whether present life styles are acceptable and whether there is any reason to pass them on to the next generation. As a great assumption subsist that a concept of 'sustainability' must as well remedy social inequalities and environmental damages while maintaining a sound economic base. It thus reveals over study that only development that manages to balance the three objectives (economic, social and environmental) can be sustained for long.

This paper draws on secondary source of data to examine how local government can enhance sustainable development. It scans the relative existing textbooks, conference proceedings, newspapers and internet materials. Other relevant documents such as periodicals, journals, official gazette and classified documents were consulted. Thus, juxtaposing the role of local administration and the intervention of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) initiative as well as the successes and challenges of local development will be the main target of this study.

THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS

Contributing to the theories explaining the functional and institutional relevance of local government in political and economic advancement, Alex Gboyega in his book: *Political Values and Local Government in Nigeria*, advanced that there are two basic classes of theories of local government; The first class attempts to justify the existence or need for local government on the basis of its essential to a democratic regime or for administrative purposes like responsiveness, accountability and control. While the other class of theories is contrapuntal to the first class of theories as it argues that an effective local government system contradicts the purposes of a democrat regime (1987: 1-2).

The foregoing explanation however can be summed into the theoretical areas of what functional responsibilities of local governments are supposed to be (democratic ideals, political participation, protective services, infrastructural services, national integration and **socio-economic development**) Ola (1984, 2004, 2007). He went further to identify three schools to justify the purpose for the creation and existence of local government to include; democratic participatory, efficiency services, and developmental.

The first two schools of thought concern themselves with only local governments in developed countries/ western democracies. As the first school stresses democratic participatory factor that holds local government existence to bringing about democracy as well as give opportunities for political participation, education and socialization of the local citizenry. While the second school of thought which is the efficiency service holds that the essential functions of local governments are to provide services and local governments must be judged by the success they achieve in providing services measurable even by national standards. He thereafter punctured the theoretical basis of this schools based on the irreconcilable differences in the nature and characters of states as well as the level of development attained. Thus, it could be seen that democracy here is looked upon as a way of life that demands that one another's view and one another's interest be mutually appreciated and suggesting there will be fairplay, tolerance and mutual respect.

However, for the purpose of this study, the third school which is the developmental school is more supportive and thus will be aligned and subscribed to as critical examination of the previously mentioned schools lean towards providing the impression that concentration and emphasis are on local government in developed and western democracies.

The developmental school emphasizes that local government in the developing world can be an effective agent of a better life, an improved means of living, socially and economically as well as a means to a better share in the national wealth (Adeyemo, 2011: 189). The school registers that local government in each environment and individually ascertains its contribution to development even in composition and structure. Under the developmental school category, national integration, social and economic development and manpower resources development can be exhumed to buttress the conviction that local governments, especially in the emerging democracies with economic and developmental challenges can be looked at by employing the above functional criteria.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

The concept of local government throughout the world over the ages appears quite dynamic and fragile to define. However, the United Nations (division of Public Administration) (as quoted by Agi (2002: 107) defined it as a political sub-division of a nation or (in a federal system) state which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the power to impose taxes or to exert labour for prescribed purposes (socio-economic advancement). In another vein, Appadorai (1975: 287) defines it as the government by popularly elected bodies charged with administration and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of particular district or place. In the various definitions by scholars and practitioners, it can be subsumed as a government at the grassroots level of administration meant for meeting peculiar grassroots needs of the people. This is why it has been aptly defined by Orewa (1991: 22) and Agagu (2011: 17) as the lowest unit of administration to whose laws and regulations, the communities, who live in a defined geographical area and with common social and political tiers, are subjects.

Olowu (1988) notes that development as a concept is popular in policy and scholarly circles but in spite of its popularity, there is scarcely a universal consensus on what it precisely is. Instead, its meaning is tainted with subjective and normative biases. From earliest times, in the language of Walter Rodney, man found it convenient and necessary to come together in groups to hunt for the sake of survival and *improved standard of living*. More often than not, the term development is used in an exclusive economic sense and the justification being that the type of economy is itself an index of other social features (Rodney, 2009: 1).

The concept of development is perhaps the most topical issue of the present century as every nation strives after improved living from their present state. Instructively however, Todaro (1977) avers that development should be perceived as a multi-dimensional process involving the re-organisation and re-orientation of entire economic and social systems. Scholars from different disciplines variedly defined it, but for the purpose of this study, it is conceptualized to reflect the process through which the various faculties of man develop to actualize his various aspirations of development which include socio, economic, political, and cultural among others. Gueye (1995: 8) succinctly argues that development encompasses “the multifarious and multi-factorial process through which a given society is moving towards the achievement of what the people living in it consider as being the condition for the happiness of their freedom and their self-actualization as human beings. This requires, undoubtedly, a minimum of physical and human resources, as well as the setting up of machineries (economic, political, social etc) for the development and more efficient management of these resources, as well as the equitable redistribution of the benefits among all members of the society. While, Todaro (1989) submits that it is best viewed as a “physical reality and a state of mind in which society has, through some combination of social, economic and institutional process secured the means of obtaining better life”.

Thomas (2000) in his work on *Poverty and Development in the 21st Century* explains three ways ‘development’ is used viz: vision; a vision or description of how desirable a society is, historical process; social change that takes place over long periods of times due to inadequate processes, and action; which is deliberate effort to change things for better. In the recent attempts made to have a comprehensive and composite measure and definition of development, the United Nations “suffering index” which is a composite index showing the “quality of life” in the various countries posits that some of the social and economic indicators of development now used in literature include; ten economic, five social and five demographic variables: the economic factors include: (a) per capital GNP (b) per capita growth rate (c) total export (F.O.B) (d) total imports (C.I.F) (e) net bilateral ODA from development assistance committee (f) internal reserves (g) income distribution (h) average hours worked per week (i) percentage of workers in non-agricultural occupation; and (j) percentage of GNP from agriculture. The social indicators include: (a) literacy rate (in percentage) (b) per capital energy consumption (c) protein consumption per capital (calorie intake) (d) ratio of doctors to population; and (e) average number of persons per room (person per cubic feet). While the demographic indicators include: (a) population (b) life expectancy at birth (c) crude death rate (d) crude birth rate; and (e) infant mortality rate. Ebo and Oleru, (1993: 9-10) cited in Okeke and Eme (2011: 41-42)

Meanwhile, the introduction of the term ‘sustainable’ to development is worthy of note. It is formalized in this study as it was defined by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development in the 1987 Brundtland Report, it is “those paths of social, economic and political progress that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Notably as emphasized, the concept of sustainability relates to the

maintenance and enhancement of environmental, social and economic resources, in order to meet the needs of current and future generations. In ensuring sustainability of development however, it must necessarily ensure that the full potentials of individuals and groups are afforded adequate opportunity of realization in an environment of self confidence and dignity. Jonathan (2000) identifies the basic aspects of sustainable development to include: economic; which presupposes that the system must be able to produce goods and services on a continuing basis, to maintain manageable levels of government and external debts/ expenditures, environment; advocating a stable resource base, avoiding over-exploitation of renewable resources system and social; which urges distributional equity, adequate provision of social services, including health and education, gender equality, political accountability and participation, suggesting that when the objectives are achieved, development will be guaranteed and the world will be a better place for us all to live.

RELEVANCE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN (NATIONAL) DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Moving properly into the discussion on the relationship between local government and development plans in Nigeria, it is important to state according to Edeh, (2011: 205) the functions expected of a local government which include;

- 1) To make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by devolving or delegating them to local representative bodies
- 2) To facilitate the exercise of democratic self-government close to local levels of our society, and to encourage initiative and leadership potentials
- 3) To mobilize human and material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development; and
- 4) To provide a two-way channel of communications between the local communities and the government (both state and federal)

Ostensibly, the creation of local government is usually necessitated by the aforementioned. Furthermore, Agagu (2009: 203) posits that local governments worldwide exhibit the following characteristics. One, it is a recognizable political unit usually with defined authority. Two, it is a legal entity in that it is created by law therefore has a corporate entity. As such, it can sue and be sued. Three, it is the government close to the grassroots. In other words, it has jurisdiction over people inhabiting its geographical terrain. Four, it has some powers over its administration. (These are powers stipulated by the constitution or laws enacted by the state's houses of assembly). Five, it lacks full sovereignty since it is a creation of central and or intermediate legislature. Six, it possesses the authority and institutional structure necessary for achieving the purpose for which it has been created. And lastly, the inhabitants of the local territory directly or indirectly participate in its government through their elected, nominated or appointed representatives.

Olowu (1988: v) thus identified among many potential roles of local government in national development the following:

- 1) Helping to inculcate in people positive citizenship, activities, such as; consideration, self-control, community responsibility and identity
- 2) Providing basic community services which will both improve the quality of people's lives and enable the community to generate and attract economic activities; and

- 3) Helping people, especially in the rural areas to organize themselves for the mobilization and effective management of community resources and central government programmes respectively.

In enhancing national development, the nation has dangled four medium term development plans and three long-term national development plans between (1962-68, 1970-74, 1975-1980, 1980-1985) vision 2010, NEEDS 2004 till date and lately vision 2020 respectively, Okeke and Okechukwu (2011: 149). In the same manner, the fundamental objectives of these plans which have invariably become the official medium for co-ordination and pursuing of the goals of development include the under listed checklist

- A just and egalitarian society
- More and even distribution of income
- Reduction in the level of unemployment
- Diversification of the economy
- Balanced development
- Development of technology
- Increased productivity, among others.

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AT A GLANCE

In September 2000, at the largest ever gathering of heads of states committing countries, between the advanced capitalist nations of the west and the less developed countries (LDC) (developing nations). 189 countries met at the United Nation headquarters under the auspices of the millennium summit and agreed on eight goals as well as target dates, which are:

- 1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2015 target: halve proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day and those suffering hunger
- 2) Achieve universal basic education
2015 target: achieve universal primary completion
- 3) Promote gender equality
2005/15 target: eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education enrolment by 2005, and achieve equality at all levels by 2015
- 4) Reduce child mortality
2015 target: reduce by two-thirds the child mortality rate
- 5) Improve maternal health
2015: reduce by three quarters the proportion of woman dying during childbirth
- 6) Combat AIDS, malaria and other diseases
2015 target: halt and begin to reverse the incidence of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases
- 7) Ensure environmental sustainability
Integrate the principle of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.
2015 target: reduce by half the proportion of people without access to clean drinking water and basic sanitation.
The 2020 target is to achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers
- 8) Develop a global partnership for development

There are no measurable, but goal eight commits north and south to working together to achieve an open, rule-based trading and financial system. UNDP (2003), Igbuzor (2006), MDGs (2010 report). Of note, the United Nations' deadline for the attainment of these goals is 2015. However, the African region adopted the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as the driver of these goals in Africa, while the central government of Nigeria advanced the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) as its medium blueprint for development.

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Arising from Maddick, (1966: 10) in his work titled; *Socio-Economic Development and Political Democracy: A Casual Analysis*, the close association with the people of a particular area arouses a detailed understanding not only of their needs, but also of the long term potentialities of the area. The planning of this potential development can be carried out in far greater details and with great deal, more understanding by the people of the area who are particularly and primarily concerned with its welfare, rather than those in headquarters for the latter take the larger view, and also larger responsibilities, which must cover and perforce, the whole country: and their views of the particular are likely to be based upon largely second hand information meeting as well not primary needs.

Although MDGs are essentially global and national targets, local governments without mincing words have a strategic and practical role to play. (Igbuzor, 2006: 4) contends that the poor that face deprivations in a particular locality and countries will not attain the MDGs without community action at the local level. This position strengthens the call by some advocates that MDGs should be localized as it is often said that it is the sphere of government that is 'closest to the people' and since the people are the central force/ point in the goals. He further contends that "...therefore the people are best placed to adapt policies to make the goals locally relevant according to local priorities and needs as well as to help implement such policies on ground".

Buttressing this conception is the submission at a meeting of local government leaders in Brazil in August 2004, the UN secretary general acknowledged that as many as 70% of the MDGs and the Johannesburg Plans of Implementation targets would be achieved primarily through local governments working in consultations with national governments and other stakeholders (UNDP, 2005). This is just placing in perspective that many have now recognized that it will be at the local level where real actions on the MDGs will be achieved through locally owned, driven, and assessed strategies and plans that set the goals as central aims for improving the lives of local communities.

Localization of the MDGs has however found theoretical basis in the following concepts: one, the *subsidiarity argument* which emphasizes that there are legitimate differences in levels of government (or, to use the language of the South Africa constitution 'sphere' of governance), and that issues should be dealt with by the level of government most appropriate to the nature of that issue. Specifically, subsidiarity suggests that implementation is more likely to be efficient at the local level because of local knowledge, sensitivity to specific local conditions, local engagement and participation.

Second, is in the *inequality argument* that points to the fact that national averages tend to mask significant local variations, with, in the most cases, the national averages being misleading or even meaningless. Third, the *complementarity argument* that rejects the dichotomy and confrontation of national versus local, and recognizes the essential linkages between national and local (and, indeed, global-national-local and vice versa) Fourth is the *thematic argument* that recognizes the ability of local government to take a holistic approach to MDG related programmes which can be so easily become separated into different ‘silos’. As a local authority perspective encourages a holistic and integrated approach and a focus in the inter-relatedness of the different sources of disadvantage (Ezebuilo, 2011: 316)

Conspicuously, the real implementation is happening at the local level. Thus, local government units as frontline institution, responds to the increasing service delivery requirements of their constituents, as the primary responsibility is in the implementation of the MDG responsive programmes and activities (Panadero, 2004)

NIGERIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MDG INITIATIVES

The point here has been established that Local Governments due to its closeness to the people contributes extensively to the implementation of approved programmes of the Millennium Development Goals as stipulated by the Federal Government. In Nigeria, like any other nation, the people at the grassroots look up to the local governments, this is important because they can easily and quickly facilitate and implement developmental projects/ initiatives towards achieving the MDGs target. (Agagu, 2009) avers that the role of the local government in the development process cannot be overemphasized especially among developing nations. He identifies five major roles to include:

- (a) the maintenance of constitutional order;
- (b) achieving technical competence;
- (c) coping with public expectations;
- (d) managing complexity, uncertainty and change; and
- (e) behaving ethically (Agagu, 2009)

However, it must be noted that there is a great scope for work to address some key issues related to sustainability, including defining objectives, identifying constraints, and resolving the relevant disagreements that can surface during implementation. Local government, thus, by taking part essentially in the implementation of programmes such that are geared towards reducing poverty and hunger through the provision and maintenance of skill acquisition centers, social service for the aged and young through social and stomach infrastructures, provision of education at basic level, primary health care, as well as creating awareness for diseases and outbreaks, even recently in the Ebola Virus Diseases (EVD) containment in Nigeria and environmental sanitation towards cleaner nation among others have really enhanced and guaranteed the sustainability of development.

Also, the appreciation and the need for sustainable development constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it. (McKeone; 2002) suggests that eradicating poverty and reducing disparities in living standards is essential to meet the needs of the majority of people. To be sustainable, economic growth must be constantly nourished by the fruits of human development such as improvement in workers’ knowledge and skills along

with opportunities for their efficient use; more and better jobs, better conditions for new businesses to grow and greater level of democracy especially at the local level. Likewise, environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens- and effective environmental laws which is offered clinically at that level.

The bottom line is that local government provides services, at least basic services to the satisfaction of the people that they serve, as every desirable goal which may be implied by economic, social and environmental advancement at the level is considered.

CHALLENGES TOWARDS ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In order to understand the dimension of the constraints, it needs to be situated within the Nigerian ecological context, as the environment exercises a great influence on the performance of any administration. Gaus (1980: 187) realized this a long time ago when he noted that the study of public administration must include its ecology. The critical point is that these ecological factors tend to determine to a very large extent, the 'ebbs and flow' of not only governmental but responsibility discharge of duties across board.

Some of the ecological factors include the people, their wishes and ideas, place, physical technology, social technology, catastrophes, and personalities.

Another critical factor is Corruption and abuse of office. These are the chief of all factors confronting development and effective service delivery. Also, bureaucratic corruption is pervasive, from the Local Government level to the Federal Level. Because of the get-rich-quick syndrome in all Nigerians, public officials are under intense pressure by their people to seize the available opportunities to enrich themselves and their retinue of officers. Adetoye (2011) notes that the dominant class, that is, the political/bureaucratic class., equates state resources with private property and the proceeds there from as profit. So, in a way, what should have been used for social development is diverted into the private pockets of the public servants. This is the major reason why the so much needed development is eluding the nation. The argument is that performance at local government is not hampered by lack of fund per se but by mismanagement of the available fund.

Arrogance of power is another major problem in instituting the machinery for MDG goals. The elected/appointed and or career civil servants at the local government level do not see themselves as serving the people nor putting the people first. This has pose a major threat to the developmental objectives of the local government. As such, these people find it so difficult to motivate citizenry to achieve any deserved ends.

Other impediments include:

- failure of checks and balances,
- lack of proper developmental and strategic planning in local government,
- human capacity,
- staffing,
- state government undue interference on local government administration and

- lack of continuity in government, among others.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The total system of which human society is part, and on which it depends for support and survival is made up of a large number of component systems, thus, sustainable development is possible only if components as well as the total system are viable.

Though, the constitutional responsibility for implementation on almost all the goals rest with the state and local governments in Nigeria's federal structure, poor governance and integration of the MDGs into national development strategies have constrained the output. Other challenges include a weak monitoring mechanism for the initiative and low stakeholder involvement (MDG Report, 2006).

Notably, integration of MDGs into the national and sub-national development plans and programmes also contribute to the present result as progressive partnership initiatives between government and foreign collaborators on one side and on the other hand, strong intergovernmental collaboration, effective coordination and systematic monitoring is traceable to the achievements so far. As we have noted, the focus on basic needs and service delivery in development has been represented by the United Nations Development Programme's series of Human Development Report. However, the MDG report of 2013 is not only consoling but charging and encouraging as it clearly state emphatically that progress towards the respective MDGs has been mixed – while Nigeria is on track on some MDGs, she lags behind in others. (MDG: 2013: 66).

We could therefore posit that for effective delivery of services geared towards achieving sustainable development, the government closest to the people has more roles to play, thus, it is advanced in this study that the central and state governments should support local government areas financially and technically to achieve maximum output.

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ABOUT AUTHORS:

Tunde Abdullateef Abioro and Hammed Adetola Adefeso: Lecturers, Department of Local Government Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Osun State, Nigeria