

Human Capital Challenges, Local Government Autonomy and Effective Service Delivery in Local Government System in Nigeria

Ayodele Charles Oluwasanmi, Ph.D

Department of Political Science and International Diplomacy

Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Nigeria.

oluwasanmi.ayodele@bouesti.edu.ng

doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/bjmas.2022.04896>

Published May 12, 2025

Citation: Oluwasanmi A.C. (2025) Human Capital Challenges, Local Government Autonomy and Effective Service Delivery in Local Government System in Nigeria, *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies*,6(3)1-10

Abstract: *There is a consensus among the scholars that a well-motivated and improves workforce is a panacea to effective and efficient productivity to achieve the organizational objective. This study examines the nexus between human capital development, good governance and effective service delivery in local government system in Nigeria with a particular reference to Ekiti State. The paper adopts theoretical analysis to explain the functional area and justify the existence of local government in Nigeria. The study relied mainly on secondary data backed by practical observation and analytical framework. The central argument is that human capital challenges and lack of financial and administrative autonomy has being the bane of inefficiency at the local government system in Nigeria The paper reveals that lack of quality personnel hindered the effective performance of local government in Nigeria. Equally, the process of chosen its administrative leadership which is more of political patronage, rather than on merit, capability and experience also accounted for mediocrities at the local government administration. The article recommends that in order to enhance a good governance and effective service delivery at the grassroots, there is need for financial and administrative autonomy and a robust human capital development programme for various categories of workers through a well-coordinated efforts of local government service commission and ministry of local government affairs to enhance better service delivery.*

Keywords: human capital challenges, local government autonomy, service delivery.

INTRODUCTION

The federal Government of Nigeria through the 1976 Local Government Reform guidelines defined Local Government as: Government at Local levels exercised through representative council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas(Goyega,1987). Going by this kernel behind the establishment of local councils, it connotes that local government's creation was conceptualized chiefly to ignite development at the grassroots; pushes governance closer to the rural dwellers and foster inclusive governance that remains the best condiment of democracy. The accomplishments of the Local Governments in its function adequately were made possible by change from time to time in composition, quality of personnel area of jurisdiction and the power conferred upon them(Harbinson,1976). It has been observed that the noble reasons for its establishment are almost defeated in the face of lack of adequate skilled personnel and financial and administrative autonomy. In other words, Local Government within the sphere of federation has been better placed potentially and to a large extent, to maintain an effective system of government at the local levels, which is responsible to the local populace. In a bid to further position the local government service for optimal service delivery at the grassroots. The 1976 Local government reforms demonstrated a commitment to new political value nation-wide. This marked a turning point in the development of local government in Nigeria. The guide line for Local government reforms identified the relevance not only in terms of functions but in terms of political responsibility based on participatory democracy. It puts it succinctly thus:

According to Adamolekun (cited in Bamidele 2020) what distinguishes the 1976 local government reforms from all previous reform exercises in the country is the formal and unequivocal local recognition of local government as constituting a distinct level of government with defined boundaries, clearly stated functions and provisions for ensuring adequate human and financial resources.

Analyzing the situation, the reforms not only acknowledged local government as third tier of government but for the first time created a uniform system of local governments administration throughout the whole country thus eliminating the variations that had hither to existed. These reforms are intended to entrust political responsibility to where it is most crucial and most beneficial, that is to the people. One crucial role the third tier of government plays that promotes the ends of democracy is the provision of basic services to the people. These are certain services which the third tier known how to provide better, such as provision of market skills, medicare for the people at this level, care for the aged and the handicapped, e.t.c. these social services are regarded as vital to the realization of the ends of democracy and the development of the human condition (Grinolle,2002).

In view of the above, it is imperative to ask if the local government has failed as an instrument of development or what are the challenges facing the local government as a third – tier of government? This paper therefore focuses on theoretical analysis of local government, the concept of local government autonomy, human capital challenges and nexus between local government autonomy, human capital challenges and effective service delivery at the third-tier of government in Nigeria.

Theoretical review of Local Government and Democracy

Attempt at defining the concepts of local government and democracy has always been hard task because these concepts belong to the contested category, but many of these scholars define Local Government as that level of government closest to the grassroots that provides for the needs of the people at this level.

Two main theoretical stands on local government and democracy are popular in the literature. The first school argues that local government is vital to democratic regimes because of the values it promotes. On the other hand, the second school posits that local government and democracy are antithetical because the promotion of one ventilates the other. J. S. Mill is one of the prominent scholars that support the local government-democracy nexus. To him local government facilitates democratic role especially in the areas of responsiveness, participatory and accountability to the people (Mill cited in Ojo, 2002). He puts it “not only are separate executive officers required for purely local duties, but the popular control over these officers can only be advantageously exerted through a separate organ”. Their original appointment, the function of watering and checking them, the supplies necessary for their operation should rest with the people of the locality.

Also, central to the practice of the local government is popular participation in governmental affairs by the local populace through voluntary organizations labour unions, peasants’ associations, school children and civil society organization and equally, for there to be genuine third-tier of government system that is democratic and development oriented, there must be direct popular participations of the people. Participation means activities of the local population pertaining to the formulation and implementation of local development policies and programmes.

Local government also provides political leadership training and education for the people at the grassroots. Several scholars regard this role as the ultimate purpose that it affords. Wilson (cited in Akhakpe, 2005) argues that it is an education in the use of power and authority, and in the risks of power; in the third place, it is education in practical ingenuity and veracity. This assertion is corroborated by Nwogwugwu,(2016) who argues that local administration institutions are the instrument with which political education is carried out. As the citizens at the grassroots experiment with political leadership at this level they are better mobilized and their confidence built to venture into higher political challenges at the state and federal levels.

Conceptual Clarification

Local Government Autonomy

Democracy is the system of government that can ensure the widest possible participation of the people in the affairs of their community. The major reason for the creation of local government is to bring governance closer to the people at the grassroots so as to ensure timely and responsive impacts of government in terms of provisions of welfare amenities to citizens. The Local government is thus empowered to create various basic amenities that could lead to improved welfare of Nigerian. In view of the above local government is empowered to impose certain levies and fines so as to compliment the allocation from the federation account towards financing its programmes (Oluwatobi & Ogunrinmola,2011).

The term local government autonomy has deep historical roots in Nigeria. It can be traced to the earliest years of post-independence rule when it was realized that the philosophy of self-governance was a realistic approach to an effective local government system. This informed part of the reasons for the 1976 local government reforms. The struggled to bring about a third-tier of government with constitutional responsibilities and functional institutions and structures has been a long-drawn one. The colonial administration in Nigeria in line with the British political tradition of centralization of power did not lay the foundation for an autonomous local government system.

This reform realized that over the years local government had suffered considerable set back of their powers from an encroachment by the state government such as poor finances, inadequate and inappropriate personnel and excessive partisan politics. Local government autonomy is the right of the Local government to have a direct access to both financial resources and administrative autonomy without any state interference. These include direct access to their found from the federation account and also the appointment of local government officers without state interference.

Human Capital Challenges

Human capital has been recognized globally as one major factor that is responsible for the wealth of nation (i.e economic development). Human capital refers to the acquired and useful abilities of all inhabitants or members of a given society (Awe, 2018). The report of the World Bank in 2020 specifically made it clear that Nigeria has found it difficult to make her economy grow in her effort to become a knowledge-based, because of the challenges faced in the national education system. These challenges include, teaching with obsolete methods, incessant strikes administrative corruption, poor funding and high numbers of out of school children. The issue of poor funding and administrative corruption has been a critical issue militating against Human capital development in Nigeria. Oluwatobi and Ogunrinola (cited in Awe, 2018) are of the opinion that all the challenges confronting knowledge and skill development in Nigeria is lack of funds and corruption. The World Bank (2010), also argued that the budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria is grossly inadequate and bellow the UNESCO bench mark

(UNESCO,2022). Equally, in Nigeria, the percentage of out of school children account for 15 percents.1:3 children are out of school; 10.2 million at the primary level and 8.1million at the junior secondary school level. 12.4million children never attended school and 5.9million left school early. In view of the above, it has been identified that there can be no significant progress and development in our society without adequate human capital resources (Nigeria Digest of Education Statistics,2022)

Efficient Service Delivery

In a bid to improve service delivery in all public institutions lead Nigeria government to established servicom unit in 2004 to improve citizen satisfaction on service delivery. The acronyms SERVICOM mean service compact with all Nigerians. Service delivery refers to the process by which an organization provides services to its customers. Akinwumi , (2023) define service delivery as a process of providing a service to a client. It involves all activities, process, and systems that are required to deliver a service from conception through Effective service delivery is a process that ensures that the service is effectively delivered to meets the expectation, and aligns with the agreed specifications or service level. It often requires close collaboration between partners and service providers (Fatile, 2011). Efficient service delivery in the public service therefore refers to the ability of government institutions to provide services that meet the needs of citizens in a timely, effective, and cost efficient manner. It involves the use of government resources in a way that maximizes the benefits to the citizens while minimizing waste, duplication, and delays (Rotberg,2014). Service is very crucial to both public and private concern. Organization can streamline service delivery processes by leveraging automated tools and platforms to monitor and ensure value for money expenditures.Moreover, Ezeani, (2012) opined that, optimizing service delivery process involves refining process to improve efficiency, reducing costs, and enhance customer satisfaction.

Efficient service delivery can be measured in the administration of a local government by evaluating the followings:

- a. **Speed:** The speed of service delivery, including response times and the ability to process and deliver services quickly. How long does it takes to fix potholes on the road, repair faulty borehole, provide a scanning machine in health center and reconstructing a damaged bridge/culvert or respond to flood or similar environmental hazards?
- b. **Effectiveness:** The effectiveness of the services provided, such as whether they meet the needs of citizens, achieve their intended goals, and produce possible outcomes. For instances are markets stores and shops constructed where they are needed? Is primary health care service available in remote areas?
- c. **Cost efficiency:** The cost of service delivery, including the ability of the government to provide services within budget constraints, and to identify and implement cost-saving measures.

Functional Area of Efficient Service Delivery in the Local Governments System

Service delivery in local government involves the provision of socio-economic goods or services to the people at the grass root level, and is a distinct domain of public policy The functions of the

local government as listed in the fourth schedule of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria are sacrosanct and are expected to be performed by local governments in applicable cases without excuse or bias.

i. **Primary Health Care Services:** A local government provides primary health care service for the location. The Basic health center is established virtually in every community in each LGA, while comprehensive health centers are in the LG headquarters. The centers operate with trained and motivated medical and health personnel in place to meet the health need of the people. For instance, the efficiency of service in the primary health care was put to test during the covid-19 pandemic and the Lassa fever epidemic that ravaged the country occurred in recent pasts.

ii. **Environmental Health Services:** Local government in Ekiti State are responsible for enforcing environmental health laws and ensuring proper disposal of wastes. There are strategies put in place to check unhealthy practices among the rural dwellers such as open defecation or operating illegal waste dumps capable of causing health hazards. This is the primary duty of the environmental health service department of the local government. The rate at which waste dumps are developing in our communities these days are alarming. The ways and manner waste are collected, transported and disposed of in all communities should be looked into. Development can only thrive in a health and clean environment.

iii. **Infrastructural Development of Maintenance:** Another primary function of local government is infrastructural development and maintenance. The local government is to provide and maintain rural and farm roads. The State local government builds bridges, culverts and drainages on township and feeder roads for effective erosion and flood control. There are professional and certified engineers, technologists, technicians and artisans in the local government service, capable of undertaking and delivering infrastructural project for the benefits of the people.

iv. **Portable water Supply and Sanitation:** The local government has the ability to provide a reliable supply of clean water to the rural populace through boreholes and other conventional means. The Ekiti State government taking a practical step for instituting the water, sanitation and hygiene WASH department in the local government under the supervision of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Public Utilities (MIPU) when the department becomes fully operational, efficient waters to rural communities and hygiene practices in accordance with the WHO standard will become permanently entrenched in Ekiti state.

v. **Effective Public Transportation:** Local government can potentially run efficient transportation system at both intra and inter local government levels. This will significantly impact the local economy, commercial activities and social integration among the people.

Nexus between Human Capital Challenges Local Government Autonomy & Service Delivery

Local government is classified as the third tier of government and has come of age with several recurring attendant problems in spite of the various reforms right from the colonial era. Yet, the system has not been effective and responsive due to administrative, financial and structural constraints which have held the system by the jugular. These challenges have manifested largely under democratic dispensations, that is, from 1979 to 1983 and 1999 till date. Local governments

in Nigeria are viewed as a mere extension of the state government. The present scenarios under the provisions of 1999 constitution section 162, which relate to financial allocation, have led to a reliance on joint accounts that undermine local government autonomy. Moreover, state governors also exploit the existing constitutional framework to control local government. Some local government chairpersons are seen as political appointees rather than elected representatives, leading to lack of accountability and erosion of democratic governance. The resources accruable to the local government from the Federation account are not only tempting but considered too juicy to be ignored by states government hence, hiding under section 7(1) and (6) of the 1999 constitution to rob the local government of the benefits of adequate funding. The Joint Account Allocation Committee (JAAC) is one of the major avenues through which states government preside over local government fund (Ibietan & Ndukwe, 2014). As a result of the, local government system has been struggling to meet the yearlings and aspirational of the people at the grassroots due to paucity of funds and improper planning. Painting the above scenario, Bamidele (2011) asserts that Local government administration is critical to grassroots development and should be strengthened in order to make meaningful impacts as partners in progress and not as an appendage of the state government. The local government that supposed to enjoy financial autonomy for so as to be able to discharge their duties zealously was being deprived of this power. Little wonder, the abysmal performance of the third tier of government in Nigeria.

However, the law through which local government was created has lacuna and engender tussles which subsumed it as an appendage of the state government. This gives the latter the power to control and manage the affairs of the local government. However, the Supreme Court's ruling in July 12, 2024 granting financial autonomy to local government is seen as a significant step towards recognizing local government as the third tier of government.

This ruling if implemented would make local government funds to go directly to them; this would eventually increase their operational independence.

The question now is do local government have the human resources capable of managing an administrative and financial autonomy of the local government? Meanwhile, the assessment and evaluation of human capital resources at the local government to manage its desired administrative and financial autonomy must be given a topmost attention. This is with an attempt to juxtapose the challenges of human capacity with the agitation for the autonomy of local government which was eventually signed to law by President Bola Tinubu. Observation by some scholars shows, that one of the major problems confronting the operation of local government in Nigeria is shortage of qualified manpower.

The local government chairmen, their management team and the councilors should perform their oversight functions as being done in the other tiers of government (State and Federal). In some instances, the process of chosen its administrative leadership is more of political patronage. Rather, appointment into such positions should be on merit, capability and experience (Ogungbemi, 2023). The human capital at the local government is dwindling at an alarming rate given the fact that there are gaps in moral commitment, certification and competency. These

days, we can hardly see the benefits of the local government in the development and advancement of our country Nigeria.

Moreover, another critical issue on local government autonomy and effective service delivery is the issue of corruption in the local government system. The issue of corruption has become part and parcel of the Nigeria society. Adeyemi (2019) argued that, corruption at the local government system has become all pervading, unabashed, uncontrolled and a persistent phenomenon. Describing the magnitudes of corruption at the third tier of government, the former President of Nigeria Chief Olusegun Obasanjo quoted in Aina (2022) once referred to seven hundred and seventy four local government headquarters across the country as looting centers. Corruption has adversely affected the development of communities within the local government in Nigeria due to the facts the quality of service delivery in all ramification are not to specification (Bello-Imam, 2007). These had led to poverty among the people living in the grass root and undermine the public support for the government.

The Local government, even though it is called the third tier of government, apparently should be the first tier because it is the first point of call in case of emergencies, in terms of war, insecurity, education, e.t.c given the fact that the administration sits right within the people. In this wise, the responsibilities and resources to manage the grassroots challenges should be domesticated. Ogunsina (2023) observes that over 70 percent of the Nigerian population resident in the rural areas and the vision behind the proposition has not really been met in Nigeria. But what we are getting at present is antithetical to the mission behind the creation. Local government system still remains Armstrong in many respects and widely adjudged underperformed. This has largely been contributing to the exponential spiraling in the poverty and unemployment rates in the country. In Nigeria, over 80 percent of government physical infrastructures are concentrated in urban cities; hence, the endemic rural-urban drift that is crippling the system and causing deep seated culture of neglect and lopsidedness in governance (Kaymmo, 2013). As such, in order to grow, and to bring about massive developments, there is need to empower the local government to make it fully autonomous and ensure that it spells out clearly, the capacity that drives its works in terms of management.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in as much as the local government autonomy is desirable, a robust human capacity is essential to engender an effective and efficient local government operation, capable of delivering better dividends of democracy to the citizenry. What is needed for effective implementation of government policies and programmes at the grassroots or at any level of government is a skilled work force that is professionally groomed, motivated and dedicated to serving the public. There is need for strategic human resource planning at the level of personnel management. Local government autonomy when fully implemented would enhance service delivery, promote grassroots democracy and drive localized economics development.

Recommendations

* The enhanced autonomy should be leveraged upon for comprehensive reforms that could redefine the relationship between local governments and state to prevent political encroachment and promote genuine autonomy and accountability.

* Local government cannot implement a successful IGR policy without the cooperation of the society; so, it is therefore imperative for local government to improve on service delivery in order to enjoy this co-operation of tax payers, citizens believed that they are being denied basic rights and welfare, such as education, health, social amenities etc.

As a consequence, citizens are not motivated to support the state and society.

*There is need for competent human capital development through well-coordinated efforts of local government service commission in its oversight functions.

*Also proper measure must be taken to make the training of staff effective because some workers only go to training for the prerequisite attached, thus a waste resources as such workers cannot add the desired values to justify the cost of the training.

*Moreover, the ministry of local government affairs should also encourage the management of the local government to freely operate within the limits of its resources. This would enable the local government, in its own pragmatic approach could run as smooth as possible to facilitate the desired development of the communities for which they are created.

*Corruption should be eradicated in totality in the system while effort must be made to improve accountability.

*More also, no matter how independent a local government is, the finance accruing too it might not be sufficient to drive the development to the optimal level. The culture of public-private partnership being encouraged at the federal and state levels should be imbibed by councils to radicalize the development at the local government pedestal.

*Finally, in order to enhance good government and effective service delivery at the grassroots, a robust human capacity is essential to engender an effective and efficient local government approach capable delivering better dividends of democracy to the citizenry.

*Therefore, ministry of local government and chieftaincy affairs through the local government service commission of every state should evolve policies that will ensure it human resources required to cope with the challenges of implementation of autonomy such that the implementation of government policies and programmes will culminate in effective and efficient service delivery at the local government level.

REFERENCES

- Adeyemi. O.A (2019). Local government Administration in Nigeria Historical perspective in journal of public Administration and governance. vol 9 no2 : 161-179
- Awe, I.T. (2018) Nexus between Human capital development and Human capital investment in Nigeria in ondo journal of arts and social sciences, vol.18. no 2 : 176-195.
- Aina. O. K.(2022). The challenges of managing and sustaining efficiency, growth and development in a rapidly changing world. A lecture series delivered at Nuge olevy 2022. Ekiti state.

- Akinwumi. F (2023). Effective personnel management, good governance and effective service delivery in the local government system in the public servant journal Ekiti local government service. Adpromo communication Ltd.
- Akhakpe. I. (2006). Third tier of government and democracy, in (ed) Ojo.E.O challenges of sustainable democracy in Nigeria, Ibadan, John Archers Ltd. 73-88
- Ayodele, C.A. (2022). Local government Autonomy in Nigeria: the challenges, prospect and expectations, Journal of history teachers Babcock University
- Bamidele. S. O. (2011). Local government and Nigerian democracy. Ado Ekiti: Emmbas publisher p17
- Bello –imam. I.B (2007). The local government in Nigeria. Ibadan Heinmmann Educational Book.
- Ezeani, E.O (2012), Delivery the goods: Repositioning local government in Nigeria to achieve the millennium development goal (MDGs). The 66 inaugural lecture of the University of Nigeria Nsukka April 26
- Fatile. J. O (2011). Evolution and development of local government in Nigeria in iyaboo, Eajonyomiba & Fatile J.(eds) contemporary issues in local government Administration in Nigeria.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1979) guide lines for Local Government reforms, Kaduna, Government Printers
- Grinolle. M (2004). Good enough government: poverty reduction and reform in developing countries. European journal of educational studies, vol.2. no.2
- Gboyega, A. (1987). Political value and local government in Nigeria, Lagos, Nigeria Malthouse Press
- Harbinson, H. (1973). Human resources as the wealth of nations university press New York Oxford
- Ibietan. J. and Ndukwe, P. (2014). Local government Administration in Nigeria and community development: The efficiency services interrogation in international journal of management sciences, vol.3 no 10: 751-764.
- Nwogwugwu, N. (2016). Conference report on politics security and development; organized by the department of political science and public administration, Babcock University, held Oct. 11-13, 2016. Nigeria.
- Ogunsina. S (2023). Local government Autonomy versus Human capital challenges, Journal of the public servant. Ekiti local government service production vol.1 no 1: 22-23
- Ogunbemi, M. (2023). Rescuing Nigerians local government from abyss of underperformance in the public servant journal, Ekiti local government service. Vol. (1) Pg 15-18
- Oluwatobi, S.O and Ogunrinola, I.O. (2011) Government expenditure on Human capital development, in Ondo Journal of Arts and Social Science (OJASS), vol.18 no 2: 220-234
- Rotberg. R (2014). Good governance means performance and results. The Governance vol.27 ,no.3: 511-518
- World Bank. (2022). Knowledge, productivity and innovation in Nigeria: creating a new economy. Washington D.C.