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*in*

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**Administration  
in Nigeria**

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# CHAPTER TWO

## APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

*Banji Fajonyomi, Jacob Olufemi Fatile AND  
Ayoade Adekanbi*

### **Introduction**

Our understanding of the nature of Public Administration reveals that the concept of Local Government has generated a lot of academic excitement caused by the respective intellectual efforts of social scientists to evolve various approaches to explain it. These efforts have given birth to a number of “paradigms” which are commonly regarded as the dominant approaches to the study of Public Administration.

An approach to the study of Local Government can be described as a particular way or strategy for studying Local Government. Ray (1999) submitted that an approach is a mode of analysis which provides a set of tools and develops concepts for the study and comprehension of any political phenomena. It consists of standards governing the inclusion or exclusion of questions and data (Fatile, 2007). In the words of Enemuó (1999), an approach is a type of lens for focusing on a particular aspect of political life. He stated further that it is an angle or perspective from which to view political reality. Vernon Van Dyke (1960) on his part submitted that “An approach consists of criteria of selection –criteria employed in selecting the data to bring

to bear; it consists of standards governing the inclusion and exclusion of questions and data." Some of these approaches adopted by local government scholars, students and practitioners are borrowed from other disciplines most especially social sciences. Each of the approaches is unique in certain respects and stressed different ideals and aspects of local governance. Therefore the emergence of a new approach is not tantamount to the demise of an old one. Every discipline has approach or approaches, which its practitioners use.

With this premise, attempt is made here to discuss the major approaches that have been contrived by Social Scientists for the study of Local Government, the problems they raise and how to apply them to socio-political phenomenon in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### ***The Philosophical Approach***

This approach enunciates the ideals underlying the activities of local government. Enemuo (1999) argues that philosophical inquiries usually result in statements of preference, description of ideals and prescription of values. It advocates a humanistic and a philosophical bent to the rationalization of human behaviour in the activities of local government. According to Vernon Van Dyke (1960) "A philosophical analysis is an effort to clarify thought about the nature of the subject and about ends and means in studying it. Put more generally, a person who takes a philosophical approach to a subject aims to enhance linguistic clarity and to reduce linguistic confusion; he assumes that the language used in description reflects conceptions of reality, and he wants to make conceptions of reality as clear, consistent, coherent, and helpful as possible." The approach is also consisted with the pre-

occupation of early schoolars with philosophical reflections on those universal political values that were regarded as essential to the just state, and the good citizen.

It is instructive to note that the philosophical approach has been criticised for being too static, relying too much on history, and therefore suffers from objective criteria, since it cannot be scientifically or empirically validated. By a philosophy of Local Government is meant that scheme of classification and analysis which looks at the values both of the local government structures and the values and expectations of the individuals or society it ought to serve. It is safe to argue that the philosophical approach is the most comprehensive one as it takes within its purview all aspects of the activities of local government. A good example of scholars who have in the past adopted this approach is W.J.M Mackenzie, Hugh Whalen and W.H Wickwar.

### ***The Historical Approach***

The term 'historical approach' to Local Government may be used in two senses. Firstly, it may denote the process of arriving at the laws governing local government through an analysis of historical events, that is, events of the past. Karl Popper has described this approach as 'historicism'. It implies that historical processes are determined by their inherent necessities which are beyond the control of human ingenuity. In the second place, historical approach stands for an attempt at understanding local government through a historical account of political thought of the past. Fatile (2007) observes that there is a popular saying which runs thus: "we have to reconstruct the past so as to understand the present and constructively plan for the future". Thus we are able to gain insights into the present by probing and digging into the past. He further stressed



that this approach is characterized with trends and pattern of events in a given society and relies on the past to explain the present and probable future developments. It is of importance to state that for proper understanding of local government in Nigeria, it may be of necessity to examine the pattern and characteristics of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial local administration.

Muttalib and Khan (1982) assert that the historical perspectives were undertaken mainly by historians with the very aim of providing some vital and most recent information about "the social, political and administrative systems in the various communities before the arrival, during and after the time of British colonial administration. Scholars have however criticized historicism because it insists on discovering what is inevitable, and then advocates totalitarian methods for its realization. Again critics of this approach point out that it is not possible to understand ideas of the past ages in terms of the contemporary ideas and concepts. Moreover, ideas of the past are hardly any guide for resolving the crises of the present-day world which were beyond comprehension of the past thinkers.

### ***The Legal Approach***

This approach is also known as the jurist approach and emphasizes the legalistic concerns of local government. It is an attempt to understand local government in terms of law. It focuses its attention on the legal and constitutional framework in which different organs of local government have to function, inquires into their respective legal position, their powers and the procedure which makes their actions legally valid. It also views local government as a legal matter i.e. infused with legal and adjudicatory concerns. According to Awofeso (2004) emphasis were place

on the legal implications of local government administration under the representative local government that replaced the colonial Native Authorities. The new system were given special attention particularly the law governing local authorities. Scholars like Oyediran (1988), Awa (1981), Adamolekun (1983), Bello-Imam (1996) and Gboyega (1987) have all carried out studies on local governments with special attention on the legal structure, constitutional authorities, their stated duties, and the limits of their powers.

This approach thus incorporates judicial outlook. Fatile (2007) buttresses this position when he observes that the acceptance of legal training as the critical requirement for government officials is traceable to some countries in Europe such as Germany, France, Austria, Prussia, and Belgium. This approach results in ways in which things are supposed to be done without noting how they are actually done.

The legal approach may however prove inadequate in understanding the complex political forces, processes and behavior which might operate outside legal-formal framework, yet it is not entirely insignificant. As Vernon Van Dyke has rightly observed:

*Nor is a legal approach to be disparaged. After all, both the procedures and the substance of political action at every level are often controlled by law.*

Moreover, all political processes at the local level to become effective and stable culminate in legal provisions. Besides the study of constitutional law in spite of its limited use in understanding local governance, continues to play a pivotal role in the social and political life of almost every nation.

### ***The Political Approach***

Borrowing heavily from the works of political scientists, many local government scholars have postulated about the political approach. Politics according to Easton (1971) is the authoritative allocation of values. Consequently local government scholars and practitioners argued that local government is part of the independent and inter-related political structures aimed at ensuring the greater distribution of political power by performing some political roles which include political recruitment, socialization, interest articulation, interest aggregation, policy-making and implementation at the grassroots. In essence, this approach stresses that local governments are organized around the political values of representatives, responsiveness and accountability to the citizenry (Naidu, 2005).

### ***The Empirical-Quantitative Approach***

Students, scholars and local government practitioners who have developed interest, invested time and effort in studying statistics and the subsequent application of economic and mathematical tools in explaining local governance can be said to have adopted the empirical-quantitative approach. This approach permits local government scholars to draw inferences about reality based on the data at hand and the laws of probability. According to Braumoeller and Sartori (2005), one of the advantages of this approach is that it permits social scientists to aggregate information from a tremendous number of cases. Again, this approach permits us to assess the claim that observed associations among variables are due to chance. Such assessments are critical to the testing of theory, and they are often very difficult to make. It also seeks to discover and describes

*facts* and aims at making an empirical statement which is concerned with 'is'

Despite the power of empirical-quantitative study, statistical evidence sometimes is far from persuasive. This failure typically stems from misunderstanding or ignorance of the underlying purpose of this approach. Fatile (2007) corroborates this when he submitted that the greatest weakness of the Empirical-Quantitative approach lies in the difficulty of applying mathematical and analytical categories accurately to human behaviour.

### ***The System Approach***

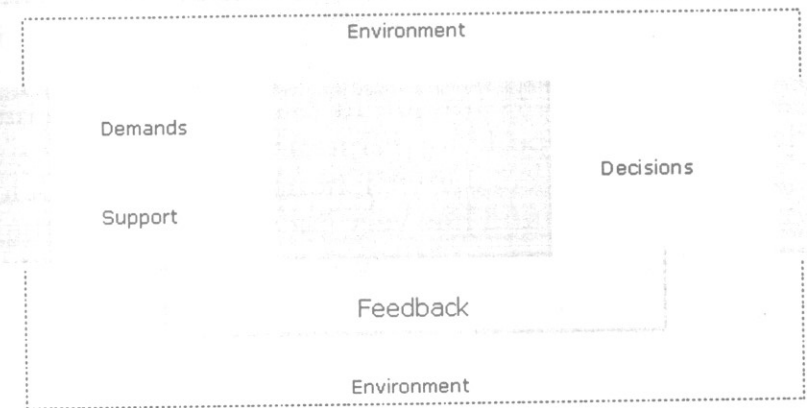
Systems approach is one of the modern approaches which has been introduced in Public Administration, especially in Comparative Public Administration by scholars like Kaplan, Easton, Almond, Apter, and Deutsch. Accordingly, they have seen system as a set of interactions, interrelations, patterned behaviour among the individuals and institutions, a set of structures performing their respective functions and one that seeks to achieve certain goal and attempts to maintain itself amidst vicissitudes.

Charlesworth (1987) defines the system approach as the study of inter-related variables forming one system, a unit, a whole which is composed of many facts, a set of elements standing in interaction. This approach assumes that the system consists of discernible, regular and internally consistent patterns, each interacting with another, and giving, on the whole, the picture of a self-regulating order. It is, thus, the study of a set of interactions occurring within and yet analytically distinct from, the larger system.

What the systems theory presumes include:

- the existence of a whole on its own merit;
- the whole consisting of parts;
- the whole existing apart from the other wholes;
- each whole influencing the other and in turn, being influenced itself;
- the parts of the whole are not only inter-related, but they interact with one another and in the process creating a self-evolving work;
- the parts relate themselves into a patterned relationship, while the whole exists, and keeps existing (Ray, 1999).

Easton's system analysis can be applied to the study of Local Government in the sense that from the environment, demands are made on the system in the form of inputs, e.g demands of the citizens for the provision of social-infrastructure amenities within the local council area. These demands are then processed into outputs, which are authoritative decisions within the local community. The feedback corrects the actions of the local government system. This is vital for equilibrium.



**Source:** Easton David (1965), *A System Analysis of Political Life*, New York, USA

The system approach scholar's have drawn much from biology and other natural sciences and have equated the organic system with social system. Indeed, there are similarities between the two systems, but analogies are only and always analogies. Any attempt to extend the argument amounts to falsification.' To relate a hand to human body is not when we relate an individual to the society or a legislature to the executive organ of the government.

All the systems theorists have committed themselves to building and maintaining the system. Their concern has been only to explain the system as it exists. What they have, additionally, done is to state the causes which endanger its existence and factors which can strengthen it. They are, at best, the status-quoists who have little



knowledge about past and perhaps no concern for the future. All the concepts that systems theorists have developed do not go beyond the explanation and understanding of the present. The entire approach is rooted in conservation and reaction. (Verma, 1966). Yet the systems approach is unique in many respects. It has provided a wider scope in understanding and analyzing social behaviour and social interactions. It has drawn a lot from natural sciences and has very successfully used their concepts in social sciences. It has been able to provide a degree of methodological sophistication to our discipline and it is still relevant in the study of local government.

### ***The Behavioural Approach***

*Behaviouralism*, or the behavioural approach to the analysis and explanation of political phenomena i.e. local government, is particularly associated with the work of political scientists after the Second World War (1939-45), but its origin may be traced back to the works of Graham Wallas (*Human Nature in Politics*) and Arthur Bentley (*The Process of Government*), both published as early as 1908. Both Wallas and Bentley were inclined to lay greater emphasis on the informal processes of politics and less on political institutions in isolation. In essence, behaviouralism is a movement in the social sciences aimed at higher level of achievement by more careful study of actual behaviour, using techniques whose value has been demonstrated in the physical sciences (Fatile, 2007). In essence, we can say that the behavioural approach really means no more than a primary focus on the actual behaviour of individuals and groups in local government, rather than rules and institutions. It also emphasizes the various factors influencing such behaviour. The behavioural

approach views local government as a pattern of behaviour that depends on a network of human relations.

Thus, the proponents of this approach not only emphasise facts over values but also argues that it is the behaviour of individual operators in the political theatre rather than the institutions within which they operate, which is the essence of politics at whatever level of government, be it federal, state or local level. The behavioural approach also emphasise the use of scientific and empirical methods in political research, and in fact, believe that political science can become as sophisticated and vigorous as the natural and physical sciences. In addition, the approach call for greater integration of political science (local government studies) with other disciplines in the social sciences such as Psychology, Sociology, Georgraphy and Economics.

Eneanya (2009) argued that the behavioural approach has a strong concern with procedures for collecting and utilizing data, such as: social survey questionnaire and developing knowledge that is verifiable. Again, this approach gives importance to description and neglects prescription. Awofeso (2004) submitted that this approach has witnessed few works on the study of local government in Nigeria in most recent time. It is instructive to note, however, that this approach has made an important contribution to the understanding of why officials and local government employees act as they do. It has revealed the truth that the conduct of local governance is greatly influenced by human sentiments, perceptions, and the environment in which local government operates.

The comparative approach has its roots in Political Science when efforts were made by political scientists to make comparative studies of constitutions with a view to

identifying the similarities existing among them. The founding fathers of this approach include, Aristotle (Typology of Government) and Montesquieu (The Theory of Separation of Powers – He studied 135 constitutions to arrive at the Theory). The comparative approach to local government focuses on identifying significant differences and similarities in the working of local government in a number of regions or localities. To this end, both legalistic and historical approaches were adopted by scholars in the comparison of institutions, legal prescriptions for allocation of political power and historical realities of local government in different localities.

Again, Olaniyi (1997) argued that through comparative approach, social scientists can make a generalization that applies to more than one in a group of comparisons. He noted that after making comparisons, one would be in position to make generalizations showing similarities and differences. While making comparison, the whole political system in which a local government is situated is taken into account. This is to say that a particular local government cannot be extracted from its organic context and compared with institutions in other regions or countries. Most time explanation is sought in the forms of government (for instances, federalism or unitarism) adopted, unique historical experience such as colonialism or war and other reasons (Awofeso, 2004).

It is important to state that despite its world-wide followings, comparisons are more difficult to make in social sciences than natural sciences where comparisons are usually carried out in the controlled conditions of the laboratory because social scientists have to work with variation which exists in the real world rather than in the

laboratory. Again, there are difficulties in the process of collecting enough relevant facts about different local government. While making cross-national comparisons, countries cannot be regarded as independent cases unaffected by what happens elsewhere, consequently there is the problem of making generalization.

### **Conclusion**

The various approaches to the study of Local Government clearly indicate the variety of ways in which local government can be understood. Each of these approaches emphasizes different values and contains some truth. Emphasizing one is certain to provoke criticisms from those who think the others are more important. In fact none is more important than another. Conclusively, it is safe to submit that since they highlight different facets of local government activity, they are complementary to one another rather than being competing propositions.

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