Culture and Socio-Economic Transformation of Local Governments in Nigeria

Setting an Agenda for Development

Edited by
Olu Obafemi
Barclays Ayakoroma
Contents

Foreword ................................................................. 5
Introduction ............................................................. 9

Chapter One
Theories of Culture .................................................. 15
–Olu Obafemi

Chapter Two
Constitutional Democracy and the Local Government System in Nigeria:
An Overview ............................................................ 22
–Steve A. Nkom

Chapter Three
Promoting Cultural Industries for Sustainable Community Development: The Imperative for Local Governments .................................................. 36
–Julie Umukoro

Chapter Four
Community Relations and Local Government Administration: Strategies for Development ............ 46
–Sola Fosudo

Chapter Five
Culture and the Socio-Economic Development of Local Governments in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis ................................................................. 66
–Abba Gana Shettima

Chapter Six
Transforming Community Festivals for Economic
Introduction
In order to put our discussion in proper perspective, it is germane to examine the definitions and meaning of some of the key words in the topic, such as, Community, Local Government and Development.

Community: First, the word community is not just a term for a geographic area; it is common to speak of different communities of interest including ethnic communities, faith communities, the business community, academic community, and so on. In other words, we have communities of interest and communities of identity, or what community psychologists refer to as Relational and Geographical communities. For local government, the legal mandate of council relates to a defined geographic area which will normally be referred to in legislation as the “community” of the council. Now, how do you merge the two concepts and types of communities? How do we make a geographical community become relational? This task is one of the objectives of this chapter.

In political governance, a council is to be responsible and accountable to the local community and most of a council’s obligations are expressed as being to the community. A community is therefore taken to be the entire district of the council. If a council is divided into wards for electoral purposes, one of the criteria for establishing ward boundaries is “community of interest,” with the implication that individual wards are themselves separate communities within the larger district of the council. Some of the characteristics which determine people’s understanding of community include the presence of key facilities such as shopping centres/markets, schools, places of worship, unique topographical features and others which provide identification.

In rural areas, where clear geographical boundaries and people’s understanding of what constitute their communities may be easily understood, the question of what constitutes a community may be relatively straightforward. But in urban
areas, boundaries and the factors which constitute a sense of community may be much less obvious. Nonetheless, what is common knowledge is that people form strong attachment to a particular place and seek collective means of influencing or taking decisions about how that place should be managed.

Increasingly, the principal demand that citizens make of their local authorities is for the right to be involved in “place shaping” for their community.

The Concept of Local Government
Local government is the closest tier of government to the people. It is created basically to decongest the functions of the central governments and to provide services that are local in character. Maddick (1963) defines local government as;

A sub-unit of government controlled by a local council which is authorized by the central government to pass ordinances having a local application, levy taxes or exact labor and within limit specified by the central government.

Local government is a grassroots political entity and it enjoys both constitutional and legal powers to perform certain legislative, administrative and quasi-judicial functions. It should be noted however that they are not totally autonomous or independent entities. They are subject to various forms of dictates and controls from higher tiers of government. But they are an indispensable tier, because of what they do to affect the lives of the local communities and how their activities contribute to national development.

Why is Local Government Necessary?
- a) Local government increases the scope for citizenship participation in the government of their locality.
- b) It provides valuable political education, which exposes citizens to the acquisition and use of power and authority.
- c) It trains people for higher public offices.
- d) It is more sensitive to local opinion. Councillors and representatives are closer to the people and respond much easily to their demands.
- e) Local initiative can easily be identified and taken on-board especially in mobilizing community to gain support for projects.
- f) Power is more widely dispersed and this safeguards and protects citizens from tyranny.
- g) Local variations and needs in service provision can better be handled by local government since it understands the needs of its own locality and it can easily mobilize groups for community development.

What is Development?
Generally speaking, development is the process of gradually becoming bigger, better, stronger, or more advanced. Development has remained an elusive concept especially in the context of African nations. Even when defined in its most simplified form as the increase in Gross National Product (GNP), most African economies have been unable to make significant impact in that direction. This is because, far beyond the economic index, many African nations are characterized by declining per capita incomes, diminishing healthcare services, sliding literacy rates, and rising impoverishment of large populations and skyrocketing unemployment. In addition, they also suffer from massive deficits, inflation, capital flight, crumbling infrastructure, and severe brain drain—all of which are antithetical to development.

Development can be further defined in the context of certain qualitative and quantitative advancement in structures, values and skills in a given society. It relates to growth, modernization, urbanization, transformation and advancement of society. It also relates to improvement in the context and quality of life of individuals or groups within a community, Adedokun (2008)
sees development as the power of the people to solve their own problems with their own wisdom, experience and resources, with a view to eliminating poverty, pestilence and starvation. Akinpelu (2002), submits that, “the target of development should be human beings and not the material accumulation surrounding them or of the economic growth of the nation.” He avers that, development is “the process of enhancing man’s knowledge, skills, attributes, boosting his self-confidence, self-reliance and self-pride to face the world.”

According to Porter (2008: 67), development involves three things – theories, strategies and ideologies. Development theories refer to logical propositions which aim to explain how development has occurred in the past and how it should occur in the future. Development strategies can be described as the practical paths to development in an effort to stimulate change within particular nations, regions or communities and ideologies are contained in the different development agenda which reflect the different goals and objectives such as social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, moral and even religious influences.

Development is closely tied to politics and governance because the production and distribution of a nation’s wealth are largely influenced by government and the solution to many socio-economic problems must come through political channels. Aparadorai (1968: 9), informs us that because of the strong influence of politics on economic conditions, early writers on economics actually considered their subject as a branch of politics and termed it Political Economy. Taxation, tariff laws, government ownership of public utilities like railways and electricity, and state aid to agriculture and industry are instances where governmental policy clearly affects economic prosperity. But new perspectives to development have emerged especially with the rise of democracy in 19th century Europe and in place of the early development ideas based almost exclusively or promoting economic growth. Potter (2008:68), informs us that the predominant ideology has changed to emphasize political, social, ethical, cultural, ecological and other dimensions of the wider process of development and change. These development functions belong to government institutions, both at the federal, state and local levels. Our focus here is government at the local council level.

**Functions of the Local Government**

The setting up of local government in Nigeria started with the 1976 local government reforms which aimed at restructuring the local government administration in conformity with modern society. The reform has since then, passed through various stages of modifications in terms of scope of operation, functions and general administration. The main objectives of the reform are uniformity and the desire to extend the principle of federalism to its logical conclusion by bringing the government to the grassroots level.

The main functions of a local government council are as follows:

a) Responsibility for basic environmental sanitation and other aspects of preventive healthcare services.

b) Construction and maintenance of roads, drains, parks, gardens, open spaces or such public facilities as may be prescribed by the State House of Assembly.

c) Collection of rate, including radio and television licenses.

d) Establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds and homes for the destitute or infrim.

e) Jurisdiction over local inland waterways not designated as international waterways.

f) Rural water supply and extension of urban water supply.

g) Provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education.

h) Administration of maternity centres, dispensaries,
leprosy clinics and health centres.
i) Agriculture and veterinary extension services.
j) Naming of roads, streets and numbering of houses.
k) Registration of all births, deaths and marriages.
l) Town planning, regulation and control of buildings.
m) Provision and maintenance of public conveniences, sewage and refuse disposal.
n) Support for arts and culture.
o) Information and public enlightenment.
p) Fire services.
q) Scholarship and bursaries.
r) Public libraries and reading rooms; and
s) Control and regulation of:
   i. Outdoor advertising and hoarding
   ii. Shops and kiosks.
   iii. Laundries; and
   iv. Licensing regulation and control for the sale of liquor, and so on.

These tasks are quite enormous, yet all the foregoing sectors of life directly affect the existence and survival of every member of a given community, usually under the administration of a local government authority. Every local government possesses the discretionary power to plan for the development of its area of jurisdiction. What is required is vision, strategic planning, resourceful leadership, effective information management, administrative competence and above all community mobilization and citizen participation.

Strategies for Development

i. **Promotion of the Concept of Community Governance:** The changing nature of the relationship between citizens and local government has been responsible for the development of the concept of community governance in local government administration. Community governance concerns the genuine collaboration between public, private and non-profit sectors to achieve desired outcomes for a jurisdiction, be it neighbourhood or a whole local government area. For governments, it represents a change of focus from the delivery of specified services to developing creative solutions to meeting community needs. Community governance is a realistic response to the complexity of modern governance. It meets the need for a more engaging form of democracy, appropriate to the 21st century and it enables dimensions of trust, empathy and social capital to be fostered and, as such, encourages civic renewal. The emphasis in this approach is on the well-being of local communities rather than the traditional practice of focusing on a prescribed number of public services.

**ii. Strategic Planning and Citizen Participation:**
Governments are often categorized as democratic based on free and fair elections. But democracy is much more than people's ability to elect their leaders. Democracy requires that citizens should have regular opportunities between elections to communicate their needs to their governments either as individuals or through civic organizations. For the people who live and work in a community, it is important to know the future development plans that have direct impact on their quality of life and their economic well being. And for elected officials and administrative staff, it is important to know the community needs in setting priorities. The most effective technique in setting these priorities and strengthening democracy is the strategic planning process.

A plan refers to the process of preparing a set of decisions for future action, directed at achieving goals by some means. The key elements in a plan are as follows:
a) It has to do with the future;
b) It is goal-oriented; and
c) It is prescriptive (that is, it prescribes steps to take for future).

A planning document involves the following:

a) Statement of goals and objectives.
b) An analysis of system structure, that is, components of the problem and how they are inter-related.
c) Evaluation and selection of possible solution to problems.
d) The design of the implementation procedure, that is, how these solutions are to be translated into concrete actions.

According to Vaiciunene (2012: 2), when citizens and local government officials work together to prepare strategic plans, then:

a) Community needs and priorities can be properly identified.
b) Local Governments are enabled to design programmes and services that meet the needs of their constituencies.
c) Local Governments gain access to community resources.
d) Government can manage conflict in the community better.
e) Public support for local government can be built.
f) A trusting atmosphere between the local governments and the community could be established.
g) A ground for future elected officials could emerge.

Citizen participation in the decisions that affect their lives is an imperative of contemporary society. Citizens, who are informed and aware, develop a positive attitude towards participating in local government decision-making and policy formulation. To turn citizen participation into reality, local governments have to be proactive, transparent and accessible, in order to create an environment in which citizens can also have a say.

Some local government officials prefer citizens to be inactive because they believe that:

a) If citizens are knowledgeable, they will make greater demands and local authorities will be criticized for their mistakes.
b) If citizens get involved, the decision-making process will be too complicated.
c) Organizing citizen participation requires more resources from a local government.
d) The results for involving citizens do not warrant the effort.

On the other hand, citizens' involvement in local government policy and decision-making:

a) Creates a strong environment of mutual trust and support.
b) Increases citizens' ownership of the implemented projects.
c) Improves the decision-making process by providing fresh views on problems and potential solutions for decisions.
d) Increases program support and reduces the resistance that many new projects encounter.

In summary, citizens who have ownership and responsibility in project related decision-making and implementation invest their efforts and energy to help local authorities make projects successful. They develop a strong feeling of responsibility and ownership for the projects.
Impact of Information and Communication

Mobilizing community members for community development purpose is important, but members of community can only be mobilized when communication is effective. Adequate community communication leads to effective collaborative effort in issues of development. Communication in relation to community development means an interactive process in which information, knowledge and skills relevant for development are exchanged between community members and information providers either through interpersonal means or through media such as, Radio, TV, Print, Telephone, or Cybernetics.

Effective communication is used to achieve the following in community development:

a) Confidence-building for raising awareness, sharing knowledge and changing attitudes, behaviour and lifestyles.
b) Collecting and exchanging information among those involved in planning development initiative with the aim of reaching an agreement on the problems and seeking options for their solutions.
c) Mobilizing community members for development action and assisting in solving problems and removing misunderstanding that may arise during development plan.
d) Enhancing the pedagogical and communication skills of development agents so as to have effective dialogue with their audience.

Without effective communication there would be misgivings and misunderstanding and that would result in conflict, lack of cooperation which would subsequently lead to under-development. In the process of community development, therefore, communication is important as it involves the study of people relating to themselves and to one another in groups, societies; influencing one another and being influenced; informing one another and being informed; teaching and being taught; loving and being loved; and entertaining and being entertained (Adepoju 2000).

Using Public Relations to Inform and Involve Citizens

Public relations is important to all organizations because it directly affects the image and reputation of an organization. In the corporate industry, the main focus is on profit, for local government, the focus is on the support and trust of citizens. Pillora Stafanie (2011), defines Public Relations as, “the continuous planned activity aimed at creating good relations and an atmosphere of mutual trust between an organisation and its target audiences.” Effective and efficient local government administration depends on how well the authority manages its communication and PR with citizens. A properly implemented Public Relations function would lead to the following:

a) Better citizen engagement and understanding of local government governance processes.
b) Wide Public Support.
c) Shared responsibility for community development.
d) Additional resource of ideas and expert capacity.
e) Multi-opinion environment in decision making.
f) Increased trust and support for local government.

To this end, every local government should set up an Information and PR department or assign the responsibility to a specific person (in small local councils) to establish good relations with citizens.

Public Relations is much more than the provision of little amount of information; it is a powerful management tool that can build the reputation of a local government, form and influence public opinion and encourage citizens to participate in community administration. Word of mouth does not always
reach the expected results because the information may:

a) Be incomplete
b) Be inaccurate
c) Distort facts; and
d) Promote rumours in a community.

The reputation of the local government indicates how effectively it works and how well it meets the expectations of the people. A good reputation translates into a high level of citizens' trust. Therefore, local government officials need to pay attention to maintaining this trust throughout their terms. Once trust is destroyed and public opinion turns against a local government administration, enormous effort and time are usually required to restore it. However, when using PR to build reputation, care must be taken not to distort the truth, or falsify information to the public. No matter the amount of media propaganda and PR, if citizens do not see tangible results of local government work, or see that elected officials keep their promises, they will lose their trust, and the government will lose its reputation.

A local government with bad reputation often takes defensive positions towards citizens. Whereas, when a local government has good reputation, even when something goes wrong, the public is more forgiving to an administration for which it has a high level of trust. Meanwhile, good reputation is not easy to build, but is easy to damage. Also, good reputation is built by a team, but can be destroyed by one person.

There are a variety of PR tools and techniques that can be used. It is pertinent to enumerate them.

(1) **Public Notice Boards**: To inform citizens about local government activities and events. Other types of information that could be posted on this board include:

i. Council decisions.

ii. Proposed and approved budgets.

iii. Bidding announcements.

iv. Local government departments and structure.

v. Taxes, duties and fees (rates).

vi. Land/Auction information.

vii. Job vacancies in the community.

viii. Donor programmes implemented in the local government.

ix. Programmes funded and implemented by local government or the central government.

(2) **Brochures and Leaflets**: These should be produced and distributed to citizens regularly. (Most of the information on the notice board can also be printed in the leaflets).

(3) **Boxes for Questions and Answers**: Opinion boxes can be installed at the city hall or local government headquarters where citizens can write and deposit their concerns, questions, comments and complaints. These should be collected and responded to through information board or the local media.

(4) **Meetings with Community Residents**: Town hall meetings and citizens' forum create an environment of mutual trust between local government and the people. These meetings are a powerful public relations method because they give both citizens and officials an immediate means of determining, whether the communication is successful and these meetings have usually long-lasting impressions on citizens.

(5) **Newsletters**: Newsletters and occasional publications are important because they inform and encourage discussions of issues and problems. The Newsletter could also cover a calendar of public events, council meetings, sponsored programmes, celebrations, and so on.
(6) **Telephone Hot Lines:** An officer can manage it during the day and it could be attached to an answering machine during non-working hours.

(7) **Local Government Website:** Websites create an open, transparent and enhanced public image for local government. It also ensures that citizens have access to information. The website could contain a wide array of information or data of elected and appointed officials, projects and programmes, announcements and budget. It could also have interactive features and it should be regularly updated.

(8) **Media Relations:** The Public Relations department should establish and maintain contacts with central, regional and local media, organize press conferences, media appearances/interviews for key officers of the council and also prepare and conduct public relations campaigns for the councils' vision and projects in television, radio and the print.

**Factors Militating against Rapid Community Development in Local Government Councils**

1) **Personnel and Competence:** Most local governments are not performing to optimal level because they do not have sufficient professional manpower to develop ideas and execute projects. There is need to employ competent and qualified hands and to also engage other stakeholders through Private-Public-Partnerships (PPP), to take local government administration to the next level.

2) **Lack of Continuity by Succeeding Governments:** This is one of the major problems facing local governments nationwide – lack of continuity of the programmes and projects of government by succeeding governments. This leads to economic and mental wastage as well as retrogressive and incoherent development.

3) **Financial Constraints:** Many local governments have lofty ideas and programmes, but the financial wherewithal to execute them is not there. Apart from the fact that the federal government needs to allocate adequate funds to local governments, the councils also need to look inward for internally generated revenue (IGR).

4) **Corruption:** Added to the problem of low level of financing is the massive corruption that takes place in many local government councils and this is due to lack of transparency and accountability. Contracts are issued even to council staff. Money meant for projects find their way into the private pockets of officials and the masses end up losing and feeling marginalized.

The reason for this is that local government accounts are not accessible to the citizens. It is difficult to find a single person, who has assisted in the budgetary process of local governments. To many, according to Fajonyomi (2012), it is believed that local government accounts are shrouded in secrecy. For instance, the publication of monthly allocations to the three levels of government has never enjoyed the support of public office holders. A former Minister of State for Finance, Mr Remi Babalola, confirmed that some states were not comfortable with continued monthly publication of revenue accruing directly to local councils. They advocated for the stoppage of the publication, or at best, the allocation be lumped together with those of the states. The reasons for this are not far-fetched. Apart from the fact that it enables the citizens to know the amount of money their states and local governments receive as allocations from the federal government, it also exposes the amount of deduction at source carried out by the state without the knowledge of local government chairmen. It is this lack of accountability that has encouraged corrupt practices in government.
5) Apathy: Citizen participation is low in most local governments in Nigeria, because the citizens feel marginalized in issues of development, and this makes them apathetic. For instance, when a health centre is burgled or the roof of a primary school is blown off, the community members do not show concern because they see themselves removed from the process of governance because the initiative and execution of programmes and projects are exclusively done by government. Most citizens do not even believe in the potentials of local governments to significantly affect development around them. Many citizens are not aware that they can and are expected to participate in the process of development in their community or council area.

6) Intergovernmental Relations: Intergovernmental relationship in Nigeria is usually associated with excessive control. Too many things are being controlled by the federal or state authorities – personnel, finance, guidelines for administration practices, budgets, projects, and so on. It has been realized however that these controls in most cases impede development, for instance, in the revenue and disbursement. When money is centrally paid into a joint account for the state and local government, the state government could tamper with it as recounted earlier, by cutting the sum coming to local government. In addition, many state governments in Nigeria do not remit the 10% Statutory Allocation of their internally generated revenue (IGR) to the local governments. Sometimes, local governments get directives from the states to do certain purchases or contribute to one project or the other which may not have had budgetary provisions. The implication of this is that they will abandon their originally budgeted projects to take care of such. This is not healthy for development.

7) Imposition of Candidates by Political Parties: One other issue that impairs effective citizen’s participation and development at the local government level is the lack of real democratically elected local government leaders. It is observed that some State Chief Executives impose candidates on local governments. When such candidate gets to power, he sees himself as more accountable to the state than the people. Some sections of the community may begin to avoid and even work against such administration. All these certainly do not and cannot create the necessary environment for development. Although the Constitution prescribes a “system of local government by democratically elected local government councils,” some local government councils in states like Ondo, Edo, Kebbi and Ekiti had been dissolved and officials appointed by the governors ran such councils. Fajonyomi (2012), reports that state governments by law are to constitute State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) for the purpose of organizing elections into local government councils. Such elections are won only by the party at the State level. We have instances in Imo State, where the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), out of the 20 political parties that contested the election, won all the 303 councillorship seats in the 27 local government councils. In Lagos State, also, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), swept all the chairmanship and councillorship positions in the election that was conducted in the State’s 20 local government councils and the 37 Local Council Development Areas.

8) Expenditure and Generating: Most local government councils concentrate on concurrent functions, such as Agriculture, Health, Education, and others, where the tendency for expenditure is high. They do not emphasize revenue generation because it is a “painful” and “tedious” exercise. They prefer to wait for the monthly grant from the federation account to pay salaries and contractors for projects, so they do more of expending than generating. There is very low initiative in transforming
the rural economy in order to expand the wealth and tax base which, in turn, will provide adequate funds for local government administration and development. This attitude has to change, for meaningful development to take place.

Conclusion
Democratic governance, with its focus on external relationship, is closely linked to the concept of community governance, which is here recommended in this chapter because of its contemporary nature. The administration of the local government system should therefore emphasize the function of promoting social, economic, environmental and cultural well being of community by involving the communities in determining the needs and priorities for their areas through the concept of community governance.

In addition, the application of Public Relations tools and programmes lead to effective communication which aids the mobilization of community members for active participation in the programs of community development. By carefully establishing communication policies and honestly crafting its response to citizens, local governments can attain a positive image and increase the trust of its citizens. In terms of planning and ideology, there should be increased intervention in the rural sector to directly stimulate the rural economy. Rural skills and resources should be tapped through community engagement. This will encourage employment generation and wealth creation in local communities. Local governments must do more than concentrating on social and infrastructural concerns to issues of industries.

Finally, the value system of the society must change for meaningful development to take place at all levels of government. Indolence and all forms of corrupt practices must be jettisoned and be replaced with the principles of transparency, accountability and participatory governance.

References