

State-Local Government Relations in Nigeria: The Bane of Transformation of Rural Communities

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Abstract

Inter-governmental relations (IGR) are the interactions that exist between and among the various levels of government in a state. It is a common feature of a federal state. This paper examined the relation between states and local government relations and how it affects the transformation of rural communities. The thrust of the problem revolves around the fact that rural communities have remained mostly underdeveloped despite the existence of local government administration. The main objective of this paper is to unravel the cause of the persistent underdevelopment of local communities thereby focusing the search on State-Local Relations. Secondary sources of data were used and document interpretation deployed for the analysis. This paper posits that State-Local Relations was responsible for the lack of positive transformation of rural communities by local administration. The relations between state and local governments in Nigeria is not one that guarantees freedom to act and autonomy for local councils. The powers of the state is so much over-bearing that local government has become an apron string of the state. It concludes that for local communities to be transformed, there is a need for a “revolutionary path” in State-Local Relations. It recommends among others full autonomy for local governments and a change in relation with state from Principal/Agent to Partnership.

Keywords: *Inter-governmental relations, State-Local Relations, Bane, Docile-Cooperation, Transformation. Rural communities.*

Introduction.

Inter-governmental Relations (IGR) are simply the interactions between and among the various levels of government in any given polity. It refers to interactions between different governmental units within a political system. This relations features prominently in a federation, and is also a subject of debate, negotiation and in most cases tension. This is so because the major issues in IGR are allocation of jurisdictional powers among the levels of government, fiscal relations and administrative mechanism for managing inter-governmental relations. According to Pritchard (1972:17) in Benovertz (1980) “inter-governmental relations are in fact intergovernmental negotiations in which the parties are negotiating in dead earnest for power, money, and problem-solving responsibility... in virtually every major public policy issue, elements of power, money and responsibility are on the bargaining table”. The objectives of intergovernmental relations in Nigeria are to promote peace and harmony among the three tiers of government which are the Federal, State and Local Governments;

and secondly to accelerate the achievement of self-reliant economy. It is against the backdrop of these objectives that the assessment of State and Local Government Relations were made.

Statement of Problem

So many researches have been conducted on lack of transformation of rural communities despite the existence of local government administration in Nigeria. Abah (2023) examined local government as an agent of development in Nigeria. Mbamalu and Ewuim (2021) addressed the challenges of community development in Anaocha local government area of Anambra State. Also, Agboeze et al (2021) studied the role of local government in community development projects in Nsukka local government area of Enugu State Nigeria: implication for Adult Education. These studies concludes that most rural communities in Nigeria have remained underdeveloped. This paper is another probe into the situation and another attempt at a solution.

Objectives of the Study.

The objectives of the study are to:

- i) Ascertain the type of relations between states and local governments in Nigeria.
- ii) Examine the extent of achievement of self-reliant economy in the local governments.
- iii) Explain the nexus between State-Local Government relations and transformation of rural communities in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this work.

- i) What is the nature of inter-governmental relations between states and local governments in Nigeria?
- ii) To what extent has local governments in Nigeria achieved self-reliant economy?
- iii) How does the link between State and local government affect transformation of rural communities in Nigeria?

Literature Review

Conceptual issues

Inter-governmental relations and transformation of rural communities are two concepts basic to this paper.

Inter-governmental Relations.

Madison (1778) in Gambari (1998) diversity hypothesis posits that the diverse elements within a political system, the better it is suited for federation. Beloff (1953) expresses a similar view when he stated that “the federal constitution is necessitated where size, culture and linguistic diversity, historic particularism and considerable decentralization prevails”. Wheare (1953) argues in line with the above that each unit of government within such a structure should operate independently within statutory or constitutionally defined spheres of competence. Granted the underlying assumption in federalism, Ayoade (1988) argues that if really federation is a device to keep separate people together without making them one

people, then such federalism limits the amount of relationship that could exist between them. This is the case in Nigeria.

Bulmer (2017) defines federalism as a system of government that establishes a constitutionally specified division of powers between different levels of government and avers that there are usually two main levels namely a national, central or federal level and a state, provincial or regional level. However, there has been disagreements as to whether the local government belongs and partakes in a federal structure. Scholars like Gamper (2005) and Gibson (2004) have argued whether local government can indeed become an equal third partner within the federal system. Put differently to what extent can the constitution define and guarantee the powers and rights of local governments within a federal arrangement? Emanating from this is whether the constitution can articulate and define the model of inter-governmental relations between the local government and higher tiers of government especially the state?

Thus, while the constitution can define the powers of levels of government, can it effectively define inter-governmental relations between a provincial or state government and its local governments. Oviasuji, Idada and Isiraojie (2010) and Adedire (2014) believe that the constitution can establish and protect a freestanding local government that can engage in cooperative, interdependence intergovernmental relations with its state government.

The evolution and nature of intergovernmental relation is a function of the degree of heterogeneity within the national polity and the resultant level of unit accommodation determines the type of federation (Gambari, 1988). There is aggregate and disaggregate federation. A disaggregate federation is built on the feeling of hatred and jealousy such that the individual units endorse federalism to guarantee self-realization. This implies in a way that disaggregate federation emerges out of the need to recognize the separate identities of the diverse units within the state, as it happened in Nigeria's First Republic. In this scenario, the relationship between and among the units may not probably be cordial. Therefore, vertical political communication in the form of relations at all levels can hardly be positive. The reason is because they seldom have a common course.

Another important attribute of the Nigerian federation is that it is nation-centred. It is not a state-centred federation. This is demonstrated in the relative affluence of the federal government in contrast with the states, as well as the relative wealth of some states vis-à-vis the others. This leads us to the issue of fiscal distribution. Fiscal distribution arises because Nigeria is a nation-centred federation. In Nigeria, the federal or central government is wealthy, while the component units are poor, simply because the federal government accumulates and controls all the resources available in the nation. The federal government is the surest source of revenue for both federal and component units resulting to a gradual diminishing of the powers of the units, and enhancing that of the federal government. In the Nigerian federation, there is uneven distribution of resources among states. The wealthy states within the federation tend to protect their wealth against the less wealthy ones, and this situation tends to reduce the prospects of positive intergovernmental relations. There has been heated debates and political protests around revenue allocation formulae in Nigeria, particularly from oil producing states.

According to Ofoeze (2002) there does not exist any on best system of inter-governmental relations for all countries and for all times, rather it all depends on the particular

circumstances of each society. Inter-governmental conflict develops when the process of the relationship among the tiers of government that possess a varying degree of authority and jurisprudence degenerate. In the words of Olugbemi (2000) “the transactional process among units of a government is not always smooth and cooperative, and indeed those inter-jurisdictional conflicts seem to be the rule rather than the exception”. Ofoeze (2002) collaborated this view by stating that conflict in intergovernmental relation has been as a result of their transactional process, and the extent of constitutional arrangement and definition. Additional factors include share of tax fields, power and jurisdictions, the quality of allocated funds as well as the unending search for an acceptable sharing formula (Olugbemi, 2000). However, in the case of local governments and states these areas of conflict are silenced. Adetokun (2000) stressed that while there is need to ensure some fiscal independence, the federal financial system is not such as will jeopardize the economic growth and equilibrium of the whole federation. At the same time, revenue should be shared to guarantee the adequacy and stability of resources available to the federal government, the state government and the local government. To Adetokun (2002), the federal government should however be the ultimate guarantor of the financial stability of all the governments in the federation and should always be in a position to assist any state government in financial difficulties.

However, the works of Wheare (1943) cited by Ofoeze (2002) argues on the contrary and posits that “if state authorities for instance find that the functions allocated to them are too expensive for them to perform, and if they call upon the federal authority for grants and subsidies to assist them, they are no longer coordinate with the federal government but rather subordinate to it; because financial subordination makes an end to the federation. Wheare (1943) as quoted by Dare (1979) argues further that both state and federal authorities in a federal system must be given constitutional power each to have access to and to control its financial resources. Each must have the power to tax and borrow for the financing of its services itself, rather than depend on a certain benefactor. This relationship is not only about federal and state authorities. Local governments are also part of the equation.

The above arguments are true in a state-centred federation where fiscal federalism obtains where resource control is practiced, and where states are truly independent, and not in a nation-centred federation such as Nigeria. In Nigeria, the federal government dominates the more lucrative and important tax sources as well as the more shares of the revenue. Resources are shared among the component units through the Federation Allocation Committee (FAC).

Transformation of Rural communities

Transformation of rural communities in this paper is used interchangeably with rural development. In general term, rural development is used to denote the actions and initiatives taken to improve the standard of living in non-urban neighbourhoods, countryside and remote villages (Balami, 2016). However according to the UN (1977), rural development is a process of socio-economic change involving the transformation of agrarian society in order to reach a common set of development goals based on the capacities and needs of the people”. It is a broad-based reorganization and mobilization of the rural masses so as to enhance their capacity to cope effectively with the daily task of their lives and with changes consequent. It is the improvement of the living standards of the low-income population living in the rural areas on a self-sustaining basis through the transformation of the socio-spatial structures of

their productive activities. The implication is that there must be a programme of activities directed at increasing the efficiency of the rural population such that rural energy is released: output, quality of life and productivity are enhanced; education and sanitation are promoted, while unwanted and unwarranted change must be reduced or eliminated (Agbo, 2023).

From another perspective according to the World Bank in Balami (2016), rural development must be clearly designed to increase production. It recognizes that improved food supplies and nutrition together with basic services such as health and education, not only directly improve the physical well-being and quality of life of the rural poor, but can also indirectly enhance their productivity and their ability to contribute to the national economy. Rural development these days ensures the modernization of the rural community and the transition from its traditional isolation to integration with the national economy. It is more focused with improved agricultural production for urban areas and international markets as well. It remained essential to generate foreign exchange earnings and to attract revenue to finance public and private consumption and investment (Balami, 2016).

Obeta and Okide (2013) outlined the following objectives of rural development to include; having greater commitment of the resources to the rural areas in terms of budgeting allocation and actual expenditure, ensuring popular participation of the rural people in the identification of priorities, planning of programmes as well as their implementation, laying greater emphasis on the use of total resources and promotion of local skills, expanding and improving rural infrastructure such as roads, market stalls, electricity, water and storage facilities, maintaining political and social stability, creating rural employment opportunities, and increasing commodity out-put and production and subsequently increase food and food supply as well as rural farm incomes. According to Agbo (2023), the objective of rural development is to promote the social, cultural, educational and economic well-being of the rural population, and to promote sustained and orderly development of the resources in the rural area for the benefit of the rural people. It also includes increase in and diversification of job opportunities and improvement of incomes in the rural area as well as mobilization of the rural population for self-help and self-sustaining programme of development. Whether in the process of providing quality primary health care services, education, agriculture extension services, security or whatever that will improve the quality of lives of the rural people, the local government would be at the forefront of these pursuits (Agbo, 2023)

Models/Theories of inter-governmental Relations.

At this juncture, it becomes necessary to examine models of inter-governmental relations. Generally, three models of inter-governmental relations are discernable. They are; the Partnership model, the Principal/Agent model, and the Functional dualism model (Bello-Iman, 1996). In the Partnership model, the three or two levels of government are regarded as equals before the law. The constitution and parliament usually delineate and regulate the activities of all the levels of government. Consequently, both the power and responsibilities of the various tiers of government could be added to and subtracted from. There is an in-built cooperation and understanding among the various tiers of government such that the functions of one tier of government can be performed by another on its behalf (Bello-Iman, 1996).

The Principal/Agent theory or Agency theory emerged in the 1970's from the combined disciplines of Economics and Institutional theory. Agency theory was developed by two different men in two different fields of science. Barry Mitnick developed agency theory from

the institutional perspective and Stephen Ross developed the same theory from the economic perspective. Both Stephen Ross and Barry Mitnick have claimed originator of the theory. Agency theory is about the relationship between agents and principals and the control of delegation (Mitnick, 2013). The theory states that as a result of agent-client relationships, there is tendency for conflicts of interest, when their views, interests, opinions, risk aversion, and expectations are not in alignment. The Principal in the Principal-Agent theory represents someone who delegates. The agent represents someone to whom authority is delegated. In a principal – agent relationship, the agent acts on behalf of the principal and should not have a conflict of interest in carrying out act (Lupia, 2015). A Principal –Agent relationship is created when the agent is given authority to act for the principal.

One of the key strengths of the Agency theory is its ability to explain why and how conflicts of interest may arise between shareholders and managers and how these conflicts can be resolved. The theory provides a framework for understanding the mechanisms, such as monitoring, incentives and governance structures that can be used to align the interest of principals and agents. However, there are also limitations to agency theory. One limitation is that the theory can be overly simplistic, assuming that the shareholders and managers are rational actors with well-defined objectives. Additionally, the theory does not take into account other stakeholders, such as employees and customers, who may have a significant impact on organizational performance. Another limitation is that the theory is heavily quantitative and may not be able to fully capture the complexity of the relationship between shareholders and managers.

Within the Principal/Agent model exist a vertical or hierarchical relationship between the central and other levels of government. The other levels of government are seen as means for locally administering centrally determined services. According to Bello-Iman (1996) “in the real sense, the lower levels of government cannot be regarded as “government”, but as a form of local administration as it is in all practical sense a field agent of the central government. The lower levels of government do not possess real independence of action”. The Functional dualism model is that in which the various levels of government within a country have functional competence in certain critical services as measured in their technical competence (Bello-Iman, 1996). Here, functional autonomy is usually emphasized. There is concurrent responsibility in the discharge of certain services like health, education, agriculture, road construction, transportation, and so on. It is obvious that State-Local Relation in Nigeria is that of Principal/Agent model.

Methodology of the Study

This study employed secondary source of data and document interpretation was deployed in the analysis.

State-Local Relations in Nigeria

In Nigeria, since the 1976 local government reforms, and subsequent inclusion of the articles of reform in the 1979 Constitution, significant legal provisions have been made to situate the local government system as a third their governmental level within the federal structure in an attempt to define its autonomy and improve its stakes in intergovernmental relations (Asaju, 2010). According to Olaiya (2016) “in a federal state, the constitution is the reference point that defines the relationship between and among levels of government...essentially because

the constitution is the fundamental law of the state that provides for the extent and pattern of interactions among levels of government; and how state matters will be conducted”

Nigeria is described as a three-tier federation and intergovernmental relation is usually expected to reflect the autonomous status of local government. However, State-local relations in Nigeria could be said to be that of Principal/Agent model and this has been affecting adversely the transformation and development of rural communities. In Nigeria, the local government is a creation of the state and therefore exercises only such power permitted by the state government. The Federal government fund to the local government is channelled through the state government. This situation makes many local governments complain bitterly of lack of fund and puts them in a dependency situation. Of recent SERAP sued some state governors to court over the unaccountable funds meant for local governments. Again state-local relations are also a function of the diversity of the state especially, if that diversity is translated into political party affiliations. State-local relations in Nigeria are affected by whether the same or different political parties control the state and local government. Inter-governmental relations tend to be positive where a political party is in power both at state and local level and the reverse is the case when different political parties are in power. In such a situation distribution of amenities by the state reflects conflict such that the state government financing such amenities penalizes opposition localities. It is not uncommon in Nigeria for such state government to dissolve such local government council with all forms of allegations.

The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (2009) as amended stipulates that local government is the third tier of government in Nigeria. It exists as a single tier across all states. Section 7 (1) of the 1999 Constitution guarantees a system of local government run by a democratically elected council. The Constitution requires all states to enact legislation providing for the establishment of the structure, composition, finance and functions of local government councils. The tenure of local government elected officials differ across state government. The state government also have power to determine when local government elections are conducted.

The core functions of local governments are defined in the Fourth Schedule of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended. It also adds that individual states may augment their responsibilities through legislation.

Discussion on State-Local Relations in Nigeria.

The inter-governmental relations that exist between the states and local governments in Nigeria is that of Principal/Agent. This type of relations does not give the local governments freedom to act independently. By implication, local government officials must do the biddings of state governors who now act as Emperors in Nigeria. Some governors have personalized governance to an extent that the state is seen as an extension of their families. The fourth schedule of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended spelt out the core functions of local councils. This functions if properly executed would no doubt transform rural communities. However, this is not happening because of paucity of funds on the part of local authorities. The Federal Government allocation for local governments is channelled through the states. This led to the development of joint State-Local Government account. However, it has been found out that most state governors do not release the full allocations meant for the local governments. In some cases, only salaries meant for local government

staff are made available to local governments. With this scenario, where would the local government source fund to execute its functions as contained in the constitution, which invariably would lead to transformation of rural communities? The fourth schedule of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution as amended outlined functions for local governments and these functions need to be executed with funds. This justifies the allocation of funds to local governments. The diversion of funds meant for local governments by the state has resulted to inactivity of the local authorities in the areas of economic and social developments. This has also made many parts of local government areas ungoverned spaces for mischief makers and criminal elements unleashing terror in some states.

Local governments do not have autonomy and freedom to act as a tier of government based on their relations with the states. The State-Local relations could best be described as “Docile-Cooperation”. In this relation, the local government is quite and easy to control. It is passive in every action taken by the state and cannot oppose it. With this type of relation, what would the local government leverage on to act and build a local economy?

The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended, provided for a democratically elected local government official. However, because of State-Local relations in Nigeria, local governments can operate for many years without elected officials. A cursory look at Table 1 shows that nineteen (19) states have caretaker councils, while seventeen (17) states have elected councils. In the states that have elected councils, the political party in power in the state also controlled the local governments. There is no opposition, no political alternative to chart a different course. This is principally because elections are conducted by the State Independent Electoral Commission which is controlled by the Governor and the ruling party in the state.

As discussed above table 1 shows the status of local government elections in Nigeria.

Table 1: Local Government Election Status (Elected/Caretaker)

STATE	STATUS	YEAR
Abia	Caretaker	2023
Adamawa	Elected	2023
Akwa Ibom	Caretaker	2023
Anambra	Caretaker	2023
Bauchi	Caretaker	2023
Bayelsa	Caretaker	2023
Benue	Caretaker	2023
Borno	Elected	2024
Cross River	Caretaker	2023
Delta	Elected	2021
Ebonyi	Elected	2022
Edo	Elected	2023
Ekiti	Elected	2023
Enugu	Elected	2022
Gombe	Caretaker	2023
Imo	Caretaker	2022
Jigawa	Elected	2021
Kaduna	Elected	2021
Kano	Caretaker	2024
Katsina	Elected	2022
Kebbi	Caretaker	2024
Kogi	Caretaker	2024
Kwara	Caretaker	2024
Lagos	Elected	2021
Nasarawa	Elected	2021
Niger	Elected	2022
Ogun	Elected	2021
Ondo	Caretaker	2023
Osun	Caretaker	2023
Oyo	Elected	2021
Plateau	Caretaker	2023
Rivers	Elected	2021
Sokoto	Caretaker	2023
Taraba	Elected	2023
Yobe	Caretaker	2023
Zamfara	Caretaker	2023

Source: Field Survey 2024.

Realising that rural communities needs transformation, and realising that to actualize this the local governments needs autonomy, the federal government of Nigeria began move to restore local government autonomy. However, in Puoreports.ng (2024), the Governors of the thirty-

six (36) states of Nigeria initiated a heated legal battle at the Supreme Court on May 30th 2024 about the federal government's attempt to provide autonomy to the 774 local councils. The Federal government's team is led by the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice Prince Lateef Fagbemi (SAN) against the governors represented by a number of attorneys. The Attorney –General was requesting an injunction to the Apex Court I the action with the case number SC/CV/343/2024 that forbids State Governors from unilaterally, arbitrarily, or illegally dissolving democratically elected local government leaders of local governments.

In the original summons which he personally signed; the Chief Law Officer of the Federation also begged the Supreme Court for an order allowing the funds in local government's credit to be transferred directly to them from the Federation account in accordance with the Constitution's provisions as opposed to the allegedly illegal joint account. Additionally, he requested an order from the Supreme Court prohibiting Governors from forming Caretaker Committees to manage local government operations in violation of the democratic system that the coostitution guarantees. Furthermore, when no democratically elected local government system is established in the states, the Federal Government should apply for an order of prohibition, prohibiting the Governors, their representatives, and privies from accepting, using or interfering with money released from the Federation Account for the benefit of local governments. This legal battle clearly shows that the state-local relations have been hampering the transformation of rural areas by the local governments

Conclusion

This paper concludes that the underdevelopment of rural communities in Nigeria is a function of the inter-governmental relation between the states and local governments. The states have appropriated too much power illegally over the local governments thereby making them ineffective. The State –Local relation is that of docile-cooperation that renders the local authorities helpless. For rural communities in Nigeria to be transformed, there is need for a “revolutionary path” on State-Local relations.

Recommendations

Against the findings of this paper, the following recommendations are made:

1. Full autonomy should be granted to local governments despite being creations of the state.
2. State-Local relations should change from principal/agent to partnership.
3. Allocations to local governments should be sent directly to each local government account. State and local government joint accounts should be abolished.
4. Local government elections should be conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The Independent State Electoral Commission (ISEC) should be abolished.
5. The tenure for any transition committee in local governments should not exceed three (3) months preparatory to election of local officials.

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