

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT AND THE SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) NEXUS

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Abstract

This paper examines the local government personnel functions, career and juxtaposes it within the context of subsisting realities and challenges towards the attainment of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) as one task amongst many at the regional and local levels of government in Nigeria. It identified the core problem that few local governments can offer competitive salaries which are available to prospective employees at the other levels of government (Federal and State) and in the organized private sector. This is aside the 'heavy hand' of the State government bureaucracy which clogs the local government service commission (LGSCs) efficient and effective function with long delays in processing applications for hiring, deploying, training, and disciplining local government staff and even separation in terms of retirement and payment of gratuity and pensions. This paper relying on secondary documents theoretically connects this problem using the human capital theory within the SDGs and their 169 targets often described as aspirational. This paper posits here that the availability of local government municipal personnel to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from its global policy agenda setting dimension to the local sector plans as it envisions to the local citizens is an uphill task towards its target of the year 2030 agenda. It suggests amongst others, that the solution remains in the decentralization concept with the deployment (deconcentration/delegation) of personnel from the central and regional governments to the local government with enhanced wages and incentives to end their careers in local communities towards the attainment of SDGs and targets which requires well trained and competent personnel.

Key Words: Local government personnel, decentralization, SDGs, and human capital theory

Introduction

This is a bird's eyes view of contemporary issues in Nigerian Local Government, personnel management. This does not assume to exhaustively cover the whole workforce of the grass-root government (the foundation authority) in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It concerns itself primarily with that sector of the local government establishment that was appointed into the service of the executive arm of government and who by the virtue of the provision of the Local Government Staff Regulations are entitled to permanent and pensionable terms of service. It takes cognizance of the intense and indispensable services of the officers who are seconded from other tiers, those attached to the Local Government by the Federal and State Government, those sent to render technical expertise by donor agencies, those on voluntary services like the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) etc. This invariably connects with the decentralization concept which drives local government administration anywhere as it displays the interplay of deconcentration, devolution and delegation on the whole gamut of regional and local governance to local people. It resonates the thoughts of Adamolekun and Rowland (1979) as they stated thus:

It has become increasingly evident that if progress is to be sustained and the local government are to emerge as forward-looking, development oriented and cost-conscious entities, very much greater attention will need to be given to staffing the local government administration organization that has so far been the case. Essentially, the success of the Local Governments and their ability to deliver services promptly and at a reasonable cost to the people, will depend on the development of a virile team spirit between the council and its committees on one hand and a highly motivated, well-trained, and efficient staff, on the other.

This assertion came barely three years after the far-reaching local government 1976 reforms and at the transition from military government to civilian democratic governance that ushered in Nigeria's third republic which likewise ended abruptly in December 1983 with another military intervention. This continued until 1999 at the edge of the new millennium, when another democratic civilian led regime started till date in Nigeria. The expectations of citizens as perceived in public interest remains constant within the larger picture of development in all facets and the local government administration is not an exception as managed by the local government workers (staff-career officers) and politicians (non-career civil servants) elected or selected as the case maybe.

Massoud (1999) cited in NOA Training Manual 1999 notes that the Federal and State Governments exhibit their superiority over local governments from time to time through such means as abolition of Councils any time there is change of leadership at their level, issuance of circulars, guidelines and directives via executive orders/legislative acts amending existing laws relating to local governments and imposition of extra-budgetary expenses amongst other show of 'power'. Example, this is seen in State governments establishment of second and third state-owned universities which are capital intensive using local government funds without much accountability.

The focus of this paper is to undertake a theoretical examination of local government career personnel recruitment and functions and juxtaposed within the context of subsisting realities and challenges towards the attainment of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) as one task amongst many at the regional and local levels of government in Nigeria.

Local Government Personnel: An Overview

The personnel of local government are categorized as political office holders and career officers in the Nigeria local government. Odoh and Isa (1999 cited in NOA Workshop, 1999) observed that while political office holders are concerned with the use of political power acquired by election or selection to meet the yearnings of the electorates and their political parties they rely on the technical knowledge and support of the career officers/personnel to translate their proposals/manifestos into reality. In broader terms the idea and concepts are discussed thus:

Personnel Management:

Personnel management is a branch of public administration. It was seen by Oyewo (1997:283) as embracing recruitment, selection, placement, and termination, industrial relations, employees' services and fringe benefits, service conditions, salary administration and promotion policies, education and training, appraisal, manpower planning in planning. In the words of Peter Drucker (1974:306) it is a method and systematic discharge of all activities that has to must be done where people are employed, which covers their selection and employment, training, medical services, cafeteria and safety, their administration of wages, and salaries and benefit and many others.

Manpower Planning:

Manpower planning deals with problems of recruitment, wastage, retention, promotion redundancy and transfer (Nwachukwu, 1988:102). He buttressed that without manpower planning it will be difficult to know the number of personnel required for recruitment, to be reassigned, due for retirement or that needs to be retained for better utilization. Within this framework, the manpower planning activities demands the deliberate outlining of personnel job design, job description, job evaluation, job recruitment, training, job evaluation/appraisal, retainment, discipline and disengagement amongst many public personnel administration and management functions. This manpower activities described follows, Nwachukwu's observations.

Job Design:

This is the specification of the content, methods and relations of job in order to satisfy technological and organizational requirement as well as the social and personal requirement of the job holder. This usually for career personnel emanates from the Local Government Service Commissions (LGSCs).

Job Description

A job description is prepared from an analysis of the job in question, and it will list the duties of the job such as the responsibilities of the job holder, limits to the holder's authority, and the relationship of the job to other positions. This is coupled with the major tasks to be accomplished by the job holders, objectives and expected results, and terms and conditions of employment. In contrast, the political office holders derive their job design and description as enshrine in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) as amended.

Job Evaluation

- (I) It's a formal standardized method of ranking jobs and grouping them into grades. Used primarily as a basis for a payment structure.
- (II) Job evaluation is a systematic method of arriving at a wage or salary structure so that the rate of pay for a job is fair in comparison with other jobs in the organization.

The Local government career personnels as stated earlier have the LGSC in charge under the State Governments Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs).

Unified Local Government Services:

In view of the peculiarities of the Local Government Services, and the felt need to protect career Local Government officials from the buffetings of partisan politics, ensure the maximum utilization of the scarce high caliber manpower resources available to local government, enhance the ability of local government service to attract, to retain and maintain credible career structures for capable hands in the service and preserve the significant gain made in building the local government service. From Grade level 07 and above, officers shall come under the control of the unified local government service. Such officers shall be subject to posting to relevant department of various local government provided that the posting of the head of department will be done in consultation with the receiving local government. Apparently to devolve power within the administrative architecture the Director of Personnel Management (DPM) is concerned with employment, promotion, discipline and training of local government staff on Grade Level 01-06 through his involvement in the functions of the junior staff management committee (Odoh & Isa, 1999 cited in NOA Workshop, 1999).

Local Government Service Commission:

In view of the need to retain the high-level staff trained at great expense over the years, and sustain the management capacity of each local government, the unified local government service is retained and coordinated by the local government service commission.

Local government service commission performs the following functions:

- (i) Appoint, post, promote and discipline, local government employees on grade level 07 and above.
- (ii) Set up general uniformed guideline for appointment posting promotion and discipline.
- (iii) Monitor the activities of each local government on appointment, discipline and promotion of local government employees on Grade 01-06 in order to ensure that the guidelines are strictly and uniformly applied.
- (iv) Serve as an appellate body for all petition from local government in respect of appointment, promotions and discipline.
- (v) Maintain comprehensive and up- to- date seniority list and nominal rolls.
- (vi) Submit an annual report of its activities to:
 - (a) All chairmen of local government in the state
 - (b) The office of the state governor and
 - (c) The state house of assembly
- (vii) Maintain a monthly local government Gazette or newsletter.
- (viii) Assume responsibilities for manpower planning, development, and training in the senior cadres GL07 and above.

- (ix) Keep 1% local government training funds for the training of members of the unified staff.
- (x) Restructure and strengthen the department of personal management.
- (xi) The chairman shall, in addition be the chairman of the Local Government Pension Board.

Junior Staff Management Committee:

Each Local Government shall have a Junior Staff Management Committee (JSMC) which will have responsibility for the appointment, promotion, and discipline of officers on Grade Levels 01-06. The composition of JSMC shall, as much as possible, reflect the geographical spread of the Local Government Area. It shall consist of representative from each department of the Local Government not below grade level 01-06 (Odoh & Isa, 1999).

Local Government Personnel and SDGs: The Human Capital Theory Nexus

On 25 September 2015, the Member States of the United Nations agreed on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The SDGs builds on the Millennium Development Goals, the global agenda that was pursued from 2000 to 2015 and will guide global action on sustainable development until 2030 (WPS Report 2021).

The summary of the specific SDGs is seen in table1 below.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent an ambitious and remarkable universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people to enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030 with the overarching aim of leaving no one behind within 17 goals, 169 targets and 230 indicators (ICLEI Africa, 2019). www.africa.iclei.org/south-africa

The enormity of the SDGs comes with an unavoidable obligation for localization to lowest of the lowest level of people living together. Hence, the core argument put forward in this paper revolves round the local government personnel's (human resources) capacity to align in partnership with institutions, state, and non-state actors towards attaining the sustainable development goals for the local people in urban and rural Nigeria.

Table 1

able Development Goals (SDGs)
: No Poverty
: Zero Hunger
: Good Health and Well-Being
: Quality Education
: Gender Equality
: Clean water and sanitation
: Affordable and clean energy
: Decent Work and Economic Growth
: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
0: Reduced Inequality
1: Sustainable Cities and Communities
2: Responsible Consumption and Production
3: Climate Action
4: Life Below Water
5: Life on Land
6: Peace and Justice, Strong Institutions
7: Partnership for all Goals

Source: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment>

The National Development Plan which enshrines the global Agenda 2030 (17 SDGs) and cascades to National Sector Plans, Provincial (State/regional) Spatial Development Framework (ICLEI Africa, 2019) trickles-down to the Local Sector Plans. Olowu (1989:18) posits that those personnel problems

associated with local governments before the reforms in the 1970s and 1990s (and in the new millennium – my emphasis) have persisted. Arguing further that local government personnel structure is bottom-heavy and only thinly peopled at the senior cadres even in the largest urban local governments. This cannot be refuted because it remains the first steppingstone for the teeming unemployed post-primary school leavers and even higher education graduates.

Put differently, the local government system remains a social welfare medium of poverty reduction in Nigeria for the local people to be employed. This provides herein the context to deconstruct the personnel management functions (recruitment, deployment, staff development.) of local governments handled by the Local Government Service Commissions (LGSCs) at the level of the State governments within the Nigerian Federation guided by the 1999 constitution. Olowu notes the absence of skilled personnel has made local government performance ineffective towards service delivery and incapacitated governance and administrative capacity to provide local citizens expectations in social housing, safe drinking water, basic health, and quality education amongst others.

Local government scholars further observe that a central problem remains that few local governments can offer competitive salaries which are available to prospective employees at the other levels of government (Federal and State) and in the organized private sector. This is aside the 'heavy hand of the State government bureaucracy which delays the LGSCs function with long delays in processing applications for hiring, deploying, training, and disciplining local government staff and even separation in terms of retirement and payment of gratuity and pensions. Aside from this, the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets are often described as aspirational, it is at municipal level where they become tangible to regular citizens (ICLEI Africa, 2019). The lacuna here is the availability of municipal staff to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from its global policy agenda setting dimension to the Local Sector Plans as it envisions the local citizens.

Interestingly, the 1976 local government reforms in Nigeria saw the establishment of three university training centres in Ahmadu Bello University Zaria (northern Nigeria), Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife (western Nigeria) and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (eastern Nigeria (Olowu,1989). The purpose was for the training of local officers, particularly for the middle and senior levels of treasury and management cadres. However, this calls for further introspection and interrogation (research) about the current state of these training centres in terms of their capacity against current Nigerian realities within the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) frames. A closer overview of the ICLEI, 2019 literature identifies six (6) areas of synergy of the Integrated

Development Plan (IDP) within the SDGs objectives. They are the following:

- Municipal Transformation and Organizational Development
- Service Delivery and Infrastructure
- Local Economic Development and Social Development
- Good Governance and Public Participation
- Municipal Financial Viability and Management
- Cross Cutting Issues

The listed six (6) areas of IDP within the SDGs framework requires staff/personnel professionals who can actualize the global, national, state, and local deliverables to the most remote rural and urban habitations. However, local government and development studies scholars opine and corroborate that there is still a severe shortage of skilled professionals in local government, with a high job vacancy rate of 70-80% projection. They further push the argument that few local governments can offer competitive salaries which are available to prospective employees at the other end of the spectrum of government and in the organized private sector (Olowu,1989).

Human Capital Theory

The human capital theory cuts across many fields of discipline and practice. According to Sweetland (1996) the human capital theory implies that individuals and society derive economic benefits from investments in people. Making clear distinction, education remains the super-structure upon which all other components of human capital study provide development in all ramifications. Within this, whether formal or informal education Sweetland concurs that it increases or improves the economic capabilities of people (Schultz, 1971 cited in Sweetland, 1996). This provides the basis for further introspection into the shortage of skilled professionals in the Nigeria local government.

Conclusion

The initial projection for shortage of skilled professionals in local government was 35-40% in the mid-1980s coming into the new millennium. Connectedly this resonates with the pursuit for global development that has witnessed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) from year 2000-2015 and the current development agenda (SDGs) with sights on the year 2023. Thus, the caliber of local government staff/personnel professionals who can push forward local governments and their communities is an uphill task in the face of increasing complexities and dynamics coming from humanity and the environment. This paper suggest that the solution remains in decentralization concept with the deployment of personnel from the central and regional governments to the local government with enhanced wages and incentives to end their careers in local communities. This is with recourse to the human capital theory which will require deliberate manpower planning connected to upgrading the public primary and secondary education system to global standards and local governments investment in personnel education via contemporary training and development strategies towards the sustainable development goals (SDGs) attainment.

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