



**IMPLEMENTATION OF PLANNING IN NIGERIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:
ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

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Abstract

Regardless of the system of governance, Local Governments worldwide serve the purpose of providing essential services to the local populace. To accomplish these goals, Local Governments strategize to ensure the realization of the set objectives. In spite of these, there are huge plan implementation flaws that affect service delivery. This paper therefore, investigates the impediments to effective plan implementation at local government level in Nigeria. The paper is conceptual and used literature and other documents such as the Financial Memoranda. It was discovered that most of the development plans at the Local Government level faced enormous challenges including deficiencies in plan implementation, lack of political will, insufficient and unreliable data, institutional weakness and inadequate funding. It is therefore, recommended that the issue of corruption should be tackled as it paves way for plan implementation; accurate and reliable data should be provided; institutional capacity needs to be strengthened; there should also be adequate disbursement and judicious utilization of financial resources. These will enable local governments to formulate and implement its plans effectively towards achieving the goals of providing essential services thereby improving the quality of life of the local populace.

Keywords: Local Governments, Planning, Plan Implementation, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Regardless of the system of government, philosophy or even circumstances under which a government operates, it is incontestable that the major priority of most governments is the provision of essential goods and services so as to enhance the socio-economic well-being of the citizens. The realization of this objective however, depends largely on government's ability to plan properly and ensure their effective implementation, while also trying to avoid or minimize challenges in the implementation process should be the major thrust of government's planning efforts.

Being an important tier of government, Local Governments in all parts of the world are generally established to serve the people at the grass root level. Also, in their efforts to make the local populace feel the impact of the government, Local Governments engage in planning and also developed strategies of making such plans a reality. This is imperative as planning is inevitable towards the realization of the goals which government set to achieve. Lack of proper planning and in-effective implementation however, leads to many drawbacks including non-accomplishment of the government's development missions that are directed to serve the needs of both the present and future generations.



Nigeria's planning experience dates back to 1940s when the British colonial office requested the colonies to prepare development plans which assisted in disbursing the colonial development and welfare funds. In response to this request, the administration in Nigeria prepared a ten-year plan of development and welfare covering the period 1946-1956. This plan led to the foundation for the pre-independent economy. The production and expansion of export crops were promoted. Also, a five year plan covering period 1955-1960 was put in place which was prepared due to advice by the World Bank (Obiajulu & Obi, 2004).

At the post-independence era, Nigeria had series of development plans, rolling plans and strategic planning but had huge experience of plan failure attributed to ineffective plan implementation. This paper therefore, specifically focuses on Nigeria's planning process in local government administration with a view to identifying the impediments to effective plan implementation. This is because previous studies to the best knowledge of the researchers did not touch the area of plan implementation at local level; instead, they focused on other issues of vital importance as well. For instance Agbodike, Igbokwe and Nkah (2014) focused on issues on local government administration in Nigeria and the challenges of sustainable development. Odalonu (2015) focused on the factors militating against the provision of social services at local level. Phillip (2016) focused on the challenges of revenue allocation in local governments in Nigeria. Alao, Osakede and Awolabi (2015) focused on the factors inhibiting effective service delivery at local level using comparative analysis between Nigeria, USA, UK and France. Other authors such as Oviasuyi, Idada and Lawrence (2010) researched on the reasons behind the establishment and development of local governments in Nigeria taking into account its functions and characteristics of good governance and accountability. Shamsuddin and Siddiq (2012) focused on the factors militating against the performance of local governments in Nigeria towards ensuring effective service delivery.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts the Bottom-Up theory of Policy Implementation. The proponent of the theory is Lipsky (1980). The assumption of the theory is that implementation is carried out through both formal and informal means. This means that to appropriately implement public policy, there is the need to involve the target population so as to have a good outcome (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003). The theory suits this research because local governments in Nigeria suffered the gap of not involving the target population in plan implementation. Lipsky (1980) is of the view that proper implementation is ensured by involving the target population, who are also known as "street level bureaucrats or field workers". The street level bureaucrats are central in the political process for the fact that they interact with the public and have a clear understanding of public needs. The need for policy experts to explicitly consider the relationship between social workers and citizens is therefore, crucial. As policy makers cannot efficiently control implementation; they have to involve those affected by it through the informal way.

Review of Related Literature

Local Government Conceptual Clarification: The concept of local government denotes a philosophical commitment to democratic participation in the management of affairs at the grassroots level. This encompasses the legal and administrative decentralization of authority,



power and personnel by a higher level of government to a community with a will of its own, performing specific functions as within the wider national framework. The local governments are duty bound to implement the ideals, objectives, programmes, and aspirations of the national government at the grass root level. Thus, local governments are not only agents but arm of government which merely serves as an instrument for effective and efficient service delivery at the local level (Oladonu, 2015).

Local Government is recognized as the third tier of government by the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and its roles are critical in terms of identifying local or rural needs and mobilizing resources to meeting those needs. The guidelines for local government reforms (1976) defined local government as “governments exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas.” Orewa and Adewumi (1992) described local government as a system of local communities and towns which are organized to maintain law and order; provide some limited range of social services and co-operation of the inhabitants in joint endeavors towards the improvements of their conditions of living.” Akinyele (1988) defines local government as a political submission of a law which is constituted by law and has substantial control over local affairs. From the definitions offered by the authors above, it could be deduced that all the authors have a somewhat similar views of what local government entails and what it is supposed to accomplish.

Local Governments has numerous functions to perform which as contained in the Fourth Schedule of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria are meant to improve the general living standard of the local people through the provision of essential services such as good drinking water, building boreholes in the rural and urban communities to complement the efforts of the water boards, electricity supply, an efficient waste disposal system, recreational facilities, construction, reconstruction and maintenance of local and other access roads, bridges and culverts, quality and affordable primary healthcare and educational services, etc. The aforementioned wide range of services and functions are products of deliberate planning which would address the felt needs of the rural dwellers (Ivancevich *et al.*, 1994).

Planning as a Management Functiona Medium for Grassroots Transformation: Planning includes all courses of action to achieve some pre-determined objectives (Ivancevich *et al.*, 1994). Thus, planning is often seen as a process of determining organizational objectives and identifying the ways and means of realizing them. Dalton (1986) sees planning as that part of the management process that attempts to define the organizations future. In a related view, Kootnz (1980) opined that planning is deciding in advance what to do, how to do it, when to do it and who is to do it. This in essence, signifies that in order to achieve development missions at the grassroots, local governments must plan ahead to provide for the present and future needs of the people. Planning therefore, bridges the gaps of the present condition to where we desire to be in the near future. Policy makers and planners at the local level need to decide in advance on what they intend to achieve and also set road maps and strategies of facilitating effective implementation as this is crucial to the success of administrative systems.

The planning process itself can be described as an exercise in which a government first chooses social objectives, then set various targets, and finally organizes frameworks for implementing, coordinating and monitoring programs/projects. It is imperative for the planners to set



objectives designed to maximize social welfare such as security, employment generation, health care, food security, poverty reduction or more generally, quality of life. Economic planners typically measure the social worth of a project in terms of the degree to which it contributes to the net flow of future goods and services in the economy and society. The availability and quality of statistical information on major socio-economic indicators represents critical influence on the choice of particular planning approach. While the complete absence of certain statistical information may preclude the use of particular models, as economic planners sometimes resort to educated guesses of the adaptation of social reality. These however, provided some of the challenging nature of planning in public domain.

Robbins (1980) identifies certain reasons why it is necessary to plan. He observed that every organization or government is influenced by changes from its environment. He further argues that planning is a way of anticipating and offsetting future changes. These force administrators to look ahead and anticipate future deviations based on data from the past and present, to consider the impact of changes on the organization and to develop appropriate responses. Secondly, administrators engage in planning as it gives some sort of directions. Viewed within this context, planning is concerned with organizations' objectives. This is because no organization can succeed if its objectives are not clearly specified, inconsistent and contradictory. When the employees know where the organization is going and what they are expected to contribute to achieve the organizational goals, there would be increased co-ordination, cooperation and collaboration. This has to do with effective hierarchical sharing of duties and responsibilities. Thirdly, administrators engage in planning in order to eliminate wastage and duplication. This is due to the fact that the process of administration involves many activities covering more than one goal, and if there is no plan, wastages and duplication are likely to be the outcome of such activities. The fourth and last reason why government plans is for the purpose of establishing standards and control. Administrators usually develop standards in the planning process against which the actual performance can be compared. To do this, administrators has to be determined and be sure of what they want to achieve. In this respect, evaluation and control will lead to identifying whether what was planned have been achieved or otherwise. Because through evaluation and control necessary information can be obtained so as to correct any identified lapse (Robbins, 1980).

3. Methodology

Methodology explains how a particular research is to be conducted. This research is conceptual even though reviews of some empirical studies on the subject matter were made. Specially, the paper used literature reviews and other documentary sources such as the Financial Memoranda for local governments (2009) and fourth schedule of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended).

4. Instruments of Local Government Plan and Implementation Process

As a tier of government, Local Governments are expected to prepare plan as a process to carry out its constitutional responsibility. According to the provisions of the Financial Memoranda, local governments shall prepare plans for capital development at such interval and in such manner as may be directed by the state government. Local Government plans shall be coordinated and integrated with the State plan prepared for the same period. The department of planning, budgeting, research and statistics of local government shall be responsible for



preparing the draft plan for consideration by the council in accordance with the instructions and time-table for finalizing and approving the draft plan before forwarding to the state government. In framing its plans, a local government shall have regard to all the following factors as stated in the financial memoranda for Local Governments (2009):

The total of the funds available, from all sources, to meet the capital cost of the plan; The estimated net additional recurrent expenditure generated by each project in the plan in the year of its completion and during the next two years (in the case of rolling plan) and the ability to meet the total additional recurrent expenditure in respect of all projects from local government funds; The availability of manpower, in particular trained professionals and technical staff, needed to operate and maintain the various projects, and the extent to which the various local communities (which should be encouraged to assist in any project in their areas) have undertaken to contribute towards the capital and running costs of the project concerned.

This indicates that any project to be undertaken must be subject to the available funds. The available funds should be able to cover the capital cost of the projects including the manpower needed to ensure effective implementation.

The Financial Memoranda (2009) also indicates that the capital cost of projects included in a local government plan shall be financed from either the capital grants from the federal and state governments, other sources approved by the state governor, contributions from the local government's surplus on recurrent account or contributions from various local communities in cash or in kind. The council may issue directives regarding the extent to which contributions shall be made.

However, where funds are available, local governments may embark on medium and large size development projects which are capable of generating enough income to the Local Government. By and large, Local Governments are allowed to embark on other priority projects that can improve wealth which the local governments cannot immediately finance. Also, Local Governments can undertake expensive priority projects which will consume huge amount of money over a long period of time. All these projects are expected to improve the socio-economic well-being of people at the local level.

To undertake these gigantic tasks, the department of planning, budgeting, research and statistics must meet as soon as possible to assess, broadly the development needs of the local government area as a whole and the available financial resources having regards to the government guidelines. The department can however be assisted with subordinate planning committee. This committee shall consult with representative of every town and village, in order to identify and evaluate those projects within the area for which it is responsible. The projects are however, in categories.

For instance, there are such projects which can be implemented by communities themselves with technical advice only being provided by the local government; this are the Category A projects. There are also projects which will normally be of a priority nature, those that qualify for grants from the Local Government and the state government. These are the category B projects. The Category 'C' projects are those that the Local Government will finance from its own resources; while the Category 'D' projects require state government and occasionally,



federal government for financial and/or technical supports for their execution. In all these undertakings, an estimate of cost and benefits should be made available with the help of the various local committees (Model Financial Memoranda for Local Governments, 2009).

Furthermore, the subordinate planning committee shall undertake its duties in accordance with guidelines issued by the Local Government to state clearly Local Government's policy regarding the funding of projects, as far as possible, the limits within which plans for development should be contained, the approach to be followed in assessing the ability of a local community to maintain or assist in maintaining a project after implementation, as well as the manner in which the SPC shall work with heads of various departments of the Local Government especially with regards to the preparation of feasibility studies.

All projects should be listed in order or priority while at the same time abiding by the rules and regulations or guidelines laid down by the local government. The prepared plans are then submitted to the various relevant committees charged with the responsibility of doing the needful by examining all proposals in consultation with the secretary and the heads of departments. The essence of examining the proposals is to ensure that all what is required in terms of cost and resources are made available. It is the duty of the committee to among other things ensure that full consideration is given to development plans which has to be discussed thoroughly by the local committees concerned.

Where there is planning committee, it shall work in conjunction with the finance and general purposes committee in discharging the responsibilities enumerated above. The appropriate committee shall then prepare a draft plan for the local government. The local government council shall accept the draft plan or accept it with such modifications as it may think fit. Four (4) copies of the final draft plan together with project data sheets and the summaries shall then be submitted to the governor's office for its comments. Subsequently, after making such amendments as are necessary in the light of the comments of the governor's office, the Council shall approve the plan, copies of which shall be forwarded to the government's office and the chairman (Model Financial Memoranda for Local Governments, 2009).

Plan Implementation Challenges Grass roots Experience: The Implementation stage is one of the most important and critical aspect in the policy and planning process. In this stage, the set goals are put to reality through the activities that follow goal setting. Implementation stage as a vital ingredient in the policy process is often described as the rest (Peter & Michael, 2015) for the fact that implementation is the last thing to be realized after the initial stages of problem identification and policy formulation. Implementation refers to undertaking a task in order to achieve some targeted goals (Paudel, 2009). In essence implementation encompasses all the procedure and efforts of actualizing the policies decided upon by the government in order to attain the desired outcome as prescribed in the policy guidelines. Thus, implementation is the routine administrative procedures of putting the targeted goals set by the government into action which is normally carried out by the government agencies or its officials. This signifies that implementation deals with the execution of government policies (Kraft & Furlong, 2007; Ajaegby & Eze, 2010). Usually in the implementation stage, the project to be undertaken is divided into tasks which are assigned to different actors to carry out. Care should therefore, be



taking in assigning duties and responsibilities so that each task is assigned to a specialist or a team of specialists in order to avoid implementation challenges.

Furthermore, despite the guidelines of the financial memoranda, certain factors have been discovered to constitute major challenges to effective implementation of government plans at the local government level in Nigeria. These factors include among others:

Deficiencies in plans implementation and lack of political will: Local Government administrators most often try to accomplish too many objectives at once without consideration of how some of the objectives are competing or even conflicting. The gap between plan formulation and implementation is often enormous hence many plans are never implemented. Added to this is the issue of poor plan performance. All these are attributable to lack of commitment and political will on the part of leaders. In fact, lack of adequate government support for plans is the prime reason why most plans are never carried out.

Insufficient and unreliable data: The economic wisdom of a development plan depends to a great extent on the quality and reliability of the statistical data on which it is used. Most often the data are weak, unreliable, simply non-existent, as one can observe particularly at Local Government level where the culture of preserving the socio-economic indices are not imbibed over the years. The situation becomes more daunting, when unreliable data are compounded by an inadequate supply of qualified economists, statisticians and other planning personnel. In such situations, it can be waste scarce high-level human resources to engage in an extensive planning exercise.

Institutional weaknesses/weak bureaucratic capacity: This has to do with the bureaucratic inefficiencies. Weak bureaucratic capacity has led to plan implementation challenges at local level including poor projects execution, lack of control and co-ordination, as well as poor supervision. Bureaucratic capacity is the strength and ability of public organizations to effectively utilize public resources in order to ensure effective implementation of government policies (Barkey & Parikh, 1991; Evan & Rauch, 1999; Fukuyama, 2013). Most often the planners, administrators and political actors fail to engage in dialogue about the goals and strategies in the planning practices. In other words, there is a communication gap in the planning and implementation processes due to lack of hierarchical sharing of duties and responsibilities. In addition, there has been much concern about incompetent and unqualified personnel and bureaucratic bottlenecks that is pervasive at the Local Government level.

Inadequate Funding: The issue of inadequate funding remains a great militating factor against effective plan implementation in Local Governments in Nigeria. This is however, linked to increasing recurrent expenditure outlays, additional responsibilities, high inflation rates and unpredictable economy all of which increase the cost of governance. Not only this, the issue of lack of fiscal discipline is another stumbling block to effective plan implementation at local level considering amount of money they receive from the Federation Account. Most planners and implementers lack fiscal discipline to judiciously utilize the limited funds at their disposal. In addition to this, there is absence of cost and benefit analysis. Most planners at local level failed to consider the cost and benefits of undertaking projects. This results to plan implementation failure as the planners were unable to accurately estimate the actual cost of undertaking projects before full take off.



5. Conclusion and Recommendation

To achieve the objective of touching lives at the local level, Local Governments must make adequate planning and also ensure that such plans are effectively implemented. Development projects all over the world originate from quality government plans. The development projects especially at the local level where they are needed most are fundamental towards improving the quality of life of the citizens. In the Nigerian context however, it is no longer story that funds purposely meant for capital development continue to disappear due to corruption and lack of fiscal discipline on the part of the personnel in positions of authority. In recent years, however, State Governments also act as a big stumbling block to the realization of the development projects at the local level as they fail to release full allocations of the local governments from the federation account in the name of joint account. The little amount allocated is however mis-handled. This limits the extent to which Local Governments can have positive impact on the lives of the local populace.

To address the identified plan implementation challenges towards ensuring effective plan implementation at local level, the research recommends the followings: Local Governments should as a matter of utmost importance address the issue of deficiencies in plan implementation and lack of political will by tackling the issue of corruption. This is because corruption is among the major issues that led to deficiencies in plan implementation. Many staff especially at local government level loots public treasury and go free. This manifested due to lack political will on the part of the government to deal with unscrupulous elements. This scenario should be completely stopped. All those who misappropriate public funds should be made to face the law irrespective of their affiliation or status in the society.

As a pre-requisite to effective plan formulation and implementation, Local Governments should try as much as possible to obtain and preserve accurate and reliable data on certain socio-economic variables that can influence changes in people's living conditions. Accurate and reliable data would assist immensely in proper planning and effective implementation of development projects. Local Governments should strengthen its bureaucratic capacity with emphasis on merit recruitment so that professional and qualified personnel can be employed who can effectively and efficiently manage the planning and implementation processes. In essence, the right caliber of personnel should not only be employed, but they should be made to undergo series of training from time to time so as to acquaint them with modern techniques of planning and budgeting as well as how to effectively manage and implement development projects. Government should ensure adequate disbursement of financial resources to the Local Governments. They should also ensure judicious utilization of the funds. Within this context however, the local government personnel charged with plan implementation should be effectively trained. This will enable them have fiscal discipline, because most of the embezzlements and misappropriation of government funds emanates from lack of fiscal discipline and lack of abiding by ethics of the profession.

Limitations of the Study

It is a well-known fact that no research is without some limitations. The conceptual nature of this research is its limitation. Empirical studies normally explore more on the subject matter. Future research should therefore consider conducting empirical research (qualitative,



quantitative or mix-mode) in order to get the actual information and facts from those involved in planning as well as implementation of planning at the local level. Future researches should as well covering either the whole country or select at least two states from each of the six geo-political zones in the country so that generalization could be made.

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