



INVOLVEMENT OF THE PEOPLE AND THEIR ORIENTATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The article discusses the involvement of the people and their orientation in local government administration in Ekiti State, Nigeria. It explores the concept of local government, emphasizing its role in delivering essential services to the citizens. The study reviews the literature on participation, accountability, and responsiveness in local government administration. It also presents empirical evidence from Nigeria and other countries, highlighting the challenges and opportunities for citizen involvement in governance processes. The findings indicate that while there is some level of citizen participation and responsiveness in Ekiti State, there are still areas that need improvement. The study concludes by recommending the active involvement of citizens in policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation, as well as the promotion of transparency and accountability in local government administration.

Keywords: local government, citizen involvement, participation, accountability, responsiveness, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Local government was not acknowledged in the constitutions of early federations, but it has received varying legal enactment in the last six decades (Fombad, 2018). As a result, acknowledging local authorities as the third tier of government in a federal system is a very recent development. Consequently, while most nations have diverse local government structures, a few constants emerge. In most nations, multi-layered architectures exist. There are differences between rural and large metropolitan communities, with the latter receiving additional rights and functions. Grassroots institutional arrangements are frequently an essential factor in the role those local authorities play; smaller communities with limited funds play a restricted role, whereas large urban governments perform a crucial governance role. The significance of grassroots administration to a country's progress and expansion cannot be overstated. The local government plays a variety of tasks, including delivering social services, education, affordable healthcare, safety, and other public improvement projects that affect the lives of its citizens (Ikeanyibe, 2016).

According to the fourth schedule of the Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 constitution, the executive role of local government encompasses a broad array of tasks and services that have a massive effect on people's livelihoods (Brown & Wocha, 2017). The system's structure and functions have changed dramatically throughout the years due to several reforms. The formation of more local government areas to contain Nigeria's population growth, the democratisation of the local government system, and a progressive increase in local government revenue from the federation account were all part of these reforms' accomplishments. Nigeria's local government administration is beset by several political, structural, administrative, and legal difficulties. Several tools of organisational, institutional, and legal mechanisms for promoting good governance are not properly harmonised and coordinated at the grassroots (Ikeanyibe, 2016).

Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, there has been a heated debate among academics and administrators, as well as the general public, about the real performance of Nigeria's local government administration (Chidiebere & Ndaguba, 2018). While politicians claim that there has been a noticeable lack in service delivery, others are sceptical. According to some analysts and bureaucrats, the institution of local governments is a sign of failure, incompetence, inefficiency,

and waste (Anayochukwu et al., 2022). In general, local government is important to a country's development and growth. One of the fundamental functions of local government is to provide essential services to rural dwellers. However, the delivery of social services to promote people's welfare, particularly in Nigeria's rural areas, has not promoted development in the rural populace's governance system. This is reflected in failing public school buildings, insufficient market facilities, and inadequate healthcare services, among others. Even though the local government in Nigeria has undergone reforms, the services provided at the grassroots are not essential values of good governance which Ekiti State, Nigeria, is not an exemption.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the paper is to evaluate the involvement of the people and their orientation in local government administration in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

Local Government

It's imperative to note that the idea of grassroots administration has no universal meaning. Many authors interpret Local Government differently based on their viewpoints due to the fundamental responsibilities and purposes of government at the grassroots, which vary by country and environment. The United Nations Office describes local government for Public Administration as "a political subdivision of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes, the governing body is elected or otherwise locally selected (Bhusal & Breen, 2021). Although the third level of government in Nigeria is a sub-set of other tiers of government governed by statute, the "substantial regulation of local affairs" required for its operation in the country has been taken over by the state government and rendered the grassroots administration incompetent.

Local administration is "a territorial non-sovereign community with the legal rights and requisite organisation to administer its affairs." Terrain, authorised by law and the opportunity to coordinate matters regarding its populace. Grassroots administration in the country has

jurisdiction; however, issues of boundary challenges are envisaged across the state of the federation (Marafa et al., 2018). Administration at the grassroots is an issue of the oversight and regulation of higher levels of administration. Grassroots administration is an agency of government ruled by its people and receives its power from the central administration to enact rules and legislation with authority to generate revenue within its jurisdiction and to implement a variety of centrally determined policies (Marafa et al., 2018). Grassroots administration is Nigeria's third level of administration, as recognised by the constitution. Furthermore, every state government of the federation must also promote and safeguard the management, funding, and makeup of local government in their different states. So, through government instrumentality at the local level, a national policy could also be enforced locally.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution divides local government roles into two categories: exclusive and concurrent functions. There are three local government roles: restricted (compulsory), overlapping, and accommodating (supplementary) purposes. The restricted responsibilities are specified in part A of the Fourth Agenda, while functions performed with other levels of government are listed in part B, which consist of the delivery and management of primary, adult, and career education, healthcare and extension amenities, commercial and industrial services, or other roles specified by the State Assembly. Local governments collaborate with the state and federal governments on various projects, most of which are with the state government. In the intergovernmental sense, accommodating roles are usually not specified in legislation but are delegated by the relevant law-making body (Adeyemi, 2019).

Participation

It is a decision-making process involving all and sundry directly or through their representatives. Participation is extensively built on the capacities of the citizens to participate constructively, the right to freedom of speech, and freedom of association. Participation is engaging in an activity or using one's voice to speak out about issues that directly impact one's life. Participation in the democratic sense is intimately related to the idea of citizenship. Citizens at the grassroots level have a right to participate, and that right extends beyond simply casting a ballot. The term "participation" refers to a variety of participatory processes by which voters can influence public policy, including representative election, policy creation, and policy implementation. Voting is

only one kind of participation; it also suggests a more engaged view of citizenship (Owen, 2020). In the governance context, citizens participate in public service as clients or consumers, in elections as voters, and in the making and implementation of policy as co-producers and co-governors at the grassroots.

Associations include non-profit organisations, business-like, advocacy, collective, religious, charity, professional, self-help, and collective. Some groups offer opportunities for direct involvement in creating or managing public goods like social welfare, public safety, and education. The democratic form of government places such a high value on the ability of its citizens to participate in the political process of their community. Voting and all forms of participation in politics must be available to everyone in political discussion, and to voice opinions on topics to people in authority on issues that concern them. Citizens' rights to be "consulted" on issues that directly affect them have typically been at the forefront of efforts to increase public access to information about grassroots government. Fair means of communication will help them and guarantee that all voices can be heard equitably by representative government (Bensus, 2021).

Accountability

This is a process by which decision-making and the results of such decisions are held up for the public to adjudge, scrutinize, and react through a feedback mechanism. Accountability is required from government institutions, the private sector, and civil society organisation. The public is entitled to know why and what decisions local authorities have made or not made. Although important, explanations alone won't make local leaders and politicians answerable. It is believed that actors will receive punishment for subpar work and rewards for success. Suppose local governments don't face serious repercussions for their acts, the effects of their behaviour (Bua & Bussu, 2020). Without significant repercussions, responsibility is only a formal statement. Local governments are responsible for their actions. Local governments must hold themselves openly accountable for their actions, inactions, and results to be held accountable for their behaviour. Politicians and officials, in a broader sense, are responsible for accomplishing fundamental goals such as promoting social and economic development, upholding law and

order, eradicating poverty and unemployment, guaranteeing impartiality and equal treatment, protecting citizens' rights, and ensuring justice and fairness.

The public's desire for responsibility and accountability from public employees at all levels of government is rising. This resulted from the increased embrace of democratic traditions and values at the grassroots worldwide. Making public officials responsible and accountable to the local government appears appealing. However, a closer examination reveals several challenges that demand discussion and policy proposals to operationalise the idea of public servant responsibility. Government initiatives to raise the level of living at the grassroots frequently fail when there is insufficient accountability. However, the government is cognizant that effective accountability at the grassroots will result in the success of government programs and activities (Mees&Driessen, 2018). As a result, the audit alarm committee was created to guarantee effective accountability among local government officials under the supervision of the government. Although the 1976 Local Government Reform was meant to lay the groundwork for the operation of an efficient and effective local government in Nigeria, empirical evidence has shown that accountability and good governance have yet to establish themselves at the grassroots level because the constitution establishing them does not permit the rural population to have control over or checks on the elected officials (Maama&Marimuthu, 2020).

Responsiveness

Responsiveness means serving the best interest of the stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe. This requires the ability of public officers at the grassroots to deliver the needed public goods within a reasonable timeframe. In essence, it states that public officials at the local government are required to respond to citizen demands promptly and responsibly and are not allowed to cause delays or leave any matter unsolved without a response (Ogunlana, 2019). They should regularly respond to residents' questions, explain their policies, and aggressively seek their advice when necessary. Being responsive, good governance necessitates that institutions and processes work to accommodate all stakeholders promptly. As a result, to achieve effective governance, the government should constantly work to meet the demands of the entire community while juggling conflicting interests in a timely, appropriate, and responsive manner.

The higher the level of good governance, the more responsive the government is at all levels (Ayogu et al., 2019).

Another aspect of responsiveness is making an effort to ensure that every citizen has access to the services to which she is entitled. Government managers and employees must therefore embrace the concept of non-discrimination, as well as the rules governing affirmative action and equal employment opportunities. No government employee has the authority to arbitrarily deny equal treatment to another person. Affirmative action is a critical strategy for ensuring that people of this calibre are taken seriously by government bodies. It also ensures that members of these groups are fairly represented among government workers. Every public employee is obligated to "oppose all sorts of discrimination and harassment, encourage affirmative action, and support persons in their dealings with government," as stated in the principles of public service. Everyone is entitled to access government services. A government agency must respond to all citizens, not only those it supports or believes will profit from its assistance. This idea of government as a tool for helping the people for whom it was formed provides the intellectual and moral foundation for the responsiveness of government institutions.

Empirical review

If citizens are permitted to use their democratic rights, it will ensure citizens' participation in democratic governance at the grassroots; the primary goal of this study is to investigate how local government participation in government processes can increase government responsiveness in Nigeria and America, the United States of (USA). Consequently, secondary resources were used to ascertain the applicability, experts were consulted, and content analysis was used. Additionally, pertinent theories were employed to explain the relationship between the study's variables. However, the researchers discovered that in the US, the local government system involves citizens in local governance, and instilling a sense of responsibility in the elected member of government should be responsive, transparent, and responsible to the community (Kessy, 2019).

On the other hand, the Nigerian local governments' actions without citizens' participation are shrouded in mystery. Because of this, local government employees in Nigeria performed

their self-serving duties with no regard for others' loyalty, responsiveness, or accountability to local voters but to their godfathers and governors. Therefore, it is advised that local governments in Nigeria have a well-democratic local government framework that can improve citizen involvement with governmental operations, and mechanisms must be implemented to compel elected officials to involve the citizens in program formulation, implementation, and evaluation projects. The study concluded that everywhere in the world, local administrations are situated in key areas that can aid the community and involve the populace in a coordinated effort pertinent to the community's well-being and growth. This implies that the effectiveness of elections in holding representatives to account, the platform where residents can voice their concerns to the local government, and their local government must have a certain amount of participation in planning, carrying out, and monitoring government needs to be more receptive to community needs (Anayochukwu & Ani, 2019).

It has been suggested that citizen involvement in local government is a successful strategy for lowering citizen mistrust and educating citizens about governmental operations. However, nothing is known about what "effective" participation looks like. By presenting three viewpoints on effective participation, as expressed by those most directly involved in the process: elected officials, local government personnel, and residents, this article increases our understanding of the importance of citizen engagement in local government budgeting. Forty telephone interviews were conducted in four communities across the country to gather perceptions of citizen participation. Differences were discovered amongst stakeholder groups, not between cities (Spiridonov, 2022).

In the tradition of traditional representational government, effective involvement is passive and is mediated through elected officials. The staff believes that informed citizen advocates make for effective engagement. In the spirit of direct democracy, citizens see interactive involvement as effective. The effect of local government involvement activities on citizens' trust in local politicians and their effects on real participation are not covered in the literature. The results demonstrate that local government programs have little influence on actual involvement and only a very small impact on trust. A substantial inverse link between trust and participation shows that involvement is primarily motivated by protests and not by local government efforts to involve the public in decision-making (Acharya, 2018).

Ghana's decentralisation concept was developed to encourage widespread participation at the local level in managing and governing local institutions for better living circumstances. This is thought to be a crucial way to increase the efficiency of service delivery and provide the locals more power to take part in the development processes that impact their lives. Although local communities and stakeholders play a significant part in local governance processes, they have a minimal impact on the decisions made on planning, budgeting, and financial management of local government agencies. One of the biggest structural issues affecting Ghana's decentralisation project and local government financial management is the low level of participation. The findings show that there hasn't been much room for local involvement and that most stakeholders don't fully comprehend the district assembly's planning, budgeting, and financial management processes (Sabir et al., 2021). Promoting efficient, responsible, and responsive municipal government has been hampered by the absence of room for stakeholder participation. Rarely do structures and procedures exist for community participation in the monitoring and assessing development programs. The study makes the case that including local communities and other stakeholders in local government systems will improve service delivery and increase transparency. It will be easier to decentralize and expedite processes if a conscious effort exists to develop capacities and make space for local engagement. The study concluded that citizens should be given a forum for active participation in political and economic decisions of the government at the grassroots (Zhang & Zhao, 2019).

Local governments are utilising social media as a primary platform for online interactive participation to increase citizen involvement in political and social issues. This study examines the numerous social media platforms used by Spanish local government constituents, such as Twitter and Facebook, to discover which fosters the highest level of involvement. We also examine how different factors affect this level of commitment. According to the findings, Facebook is preferred above Twitter as a platform for engaging with local government issues. The degree of online transparency, mood, level of social media activity, and instructiveness provided by the local government are additional elements pertinent to citizen involvement. Also, the study's findings revealed that media is an avenue by which the masses can make meaningful contributions to the development of their community. This study's results substantially contribute

to our understanding of how the chosen social media platform affects citizen involvement (Harguindeguy et al, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

This study is centred on Efficiency Theory. Mackenzie William, one of the school's most prominent supporters, believes that local government exists primarily to provide services and that its effectiveness must be measured. Some scholars agree with this school of thinking, believing that grassroots administration occurs to deliver critical services, and as such, it can be judged on how well these services are delivered on a scale of quality (Gobby&Niesche, 2019). Local government can only be justified as a tier of government if the services rendered to the public are effective. Local governments are in the best position to efficiently provide close, inherently local services, and if they do not exist, they must be established. Efficiency theory is one of the theories that explain why services are delivered in the way they are at the local level. According to the theory, certain resources and roles should be shared between the central and local governments due to their proximity. For the sake of preserving national standards, the central government should offer services such as security and foreign relations. The argument goes on to say that since local governments are closer to ordinary people, they should be able to offer such services more effectively than the federal government (Lopez et al, 2020).

This school of thinking contends that grassroots administration should be refereed not solely on its ability to promote democracy and engagement but also on the quality of services it provides to the local population that meet national standards. The local government's efficient success in providing certain basic services is so convincing that if it didn't exist, anything else would be generated in its place. “This school's main argument is that local governments function mainly to provide effective social services such as primary education, primary healthcare, local highways, sanitation, law and order, and other services. Service delivery is supposed to pre-occupy the money, strength, and time of the Local Government, leading to advocate of the efficient service school. The primary purpose of local government is to ensure effective service delivery (. Some scholars believe that this school of thought is so important in local government that it should take precedence over other schools of thought, particularly the democratic school, because the need for efficient service delivery at the local level is more compelling than democratic participation.

Efficient service delivery to the public at the local government level is gradually becoming the most important justification for local government's existence (Reddick et al., 2022). This principle is relevant to this research because people expect the local government to provide them with services that are satisfactory, timely, sufficient, and effective”.

3. Methodology

The study employed a descriptive research design to investigate the effects of local government administration and good governance in Ekiti State, Nigeria, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The population included local government employees and civil society organizations across three senatorial districts, with a sample size of 358 derived using the Taro Yamane formula. A multistage sampling technique was employed to select local governments and civil society organizations. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, such as the Chairmen of the Landlord Association, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), and Muslim Association of Nigeria (MAN). The questionnaire was structured on a four-point Likert scale. The validity and reliability of the research instruments were ensured through expert review and a Cronbach Alpha test. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis for quantitative and qualitative data, respectively.

4. Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The below table revealed the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents on each of the statements, and its value/responses were organized using Likert scale measurement, such as: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. In addition, each investigated variable's mean value and standard deviation were stated.

Table 1: The Involvement of the People and their Orientation in Local Government Administration in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

| Variable | Strongly Agree | | | | Agree | | | | Disagree | | | | Strongly Disagree | | | | Descriptive Statistics | |
|---|----------------|---------|-----|---------|-------|---------|-----|---------|----------|-----|---|-----|-------------------|-----|------------|--------------------|------------------------|-------|
| | f | (%) | f | (%) | f | (%) | f | (%) | f | (%) | f | (%) | f | (%) | Mean Value | Standard Deviation | | |
| 1. There is active participation of the citizens in political and economic decisions of the government at the grassroots | 181 | (53%) | 76 | (22.3%) | 35 | (10.3%) | 49 | (14.4%) | N=341 | | | | | | | | 3.24 | 1.211 |
| 2. The citizens can react to the action and inaction of government via freedom of information | 138 | (40.5%) | 87 | (25.5%) | 71 | (20.8%) | 45 | (13.2%) | | | | | | | | | 3.64 | 1.272 |
| 3. There is creation of an avenue by which the masses are able to make meaningful contributions to the development of their community | 75 | (21.9%) | 42 | (12.3%) | 145 | (42.5%) | 79 | (23.3%) | | | | | | | | | 2.52 | 1.461 |
| 4. A political system that encourages input from all groups of civil society | 138 | (40.5%) | 84 | (24.6%) | 72 | (21.1%) | 47 | (13.8%) | | | | | | | | | 3.67 | 1.233 |
| 5. There is active participation of the citizens in democratic process at the grassroots level. | 31 | (9.1%) | 47 | (13.8%) | 144 | (42.2%) | 119 | (34.9%) | | | | | | | | | 2.71 | 1.472 |
| 6. Local government responds rapidly to the concerns raised by her citizens in order to fulfill her obligations. | 130 | (38.1%) | 89 | (26.1%) | 74 | (21.7%) | 48 | (14.1%) | | | | | | | | | 3.65 | 1.237 |
| 7. There is involvement of the citizens in the planning and execution of governments policies at the grassroot level | 39 | (11.5%) | 75 | (21.9%) | 128 | (37.5%) | 99 | (29.1%) | | | | | | | | | 3.36 | 1.341 |
| 8. The citizens serve as a watchdog to the operation of local government administration | 109 | (27.7%) | 126 | (36.9%) | 51 | (14.9%) | 55 | (15.2%) | | | | | | | | | 3.76 | 1.265 |

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2022

The first statement in Table 1 presented the data distribution on the active participation of the citizens in the political and economic decisions of the government at the grassroots. In their responses, 181 (53%) of the respondents strongly agreed, and 76 (22.3%) of the respondents agreed. It was contrary to the views of 35 (10.3%) of the respondents who disagreed and 49 (14.4%) strongly disagreed. This was confirmed by the mean value and standard deviation ($\bar{\chi} = 3.24$, $SD = 1.211$). This data imply that the majority of the respondents affirmed that there is the active participation of the citizens in political and economic decisions of the government at the grassroots in the study area, with 257 (75.3%) as the level of agreement.

As presented in Table 1, in the second statement, the respondents were asked if the citizens could react to the action and inaction of the government via freedom of information in the study area. In their responses, 138 (40.5%) strongly agreed, and 87 (25.5%) of the respondents agreed. It was contrary to the view of 71 (20.8%) disagreed and 45 (13.2%) of the respondents strongly disagreed. The mean value and standard deviation for the variable were ($\bar{\chi} = 3.64$, $SD = 1.272$). The analytical interpretation of the data showed that the citizens could react to the action and inaction of the government via freedom of information 66%.

In line with the third assertion, the creation of an avenue by which the masses can make meaningful contributions to the development of their community in the study area. The level of disagreement was greater than the level of agreement with 65.8% of the respondents. 75 (21.9%) of the participants strongly agreed, and 42 (12.3%) agreed. It was contrary to the view of 145 (42.5%) who disagreed, and 79 (23.3%) of the respondents strongly disagreed. The analytical implication of the data affirmed that there is the creation of an avenue by which the masses can make meaningful contributions to the development of their community in the study area with a mean value and standard deviation of ($\bar{\chi} = 2.52$, $SD = 1.461$).

With respect to the fourth assertion, a political system encourages input from all civil society groups at the grassroots level in the study area. In their reaction, 138 (40.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed, and 84 (24.6%) of the respondents agreed. It was contrary to the view of 72 (21.1%) disagreed and 47 (13.8%) of the respondents strongly disagreed. The mean value and standard deviation for the variable were ($\bar{\chi} = 3.67$, $SD = 1.233$). This data interpretation revealed

that 222 of the respondents agreed with the statement that the grassroots government is a political system that encourages input from all groups of civil society in the study area.

The respondents' opinions were sought on the active participation of the citizens in the democratic process at the grassroots level in the study area. With respect to the fifth assertion, 31 (9.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed, and 47 (13.8%) of the respondents agreed. It was contrary to the view of 144 (42.2%) who disagreed and 119 (34.9%) of the respondents who strongly disagreed. The analytical implication of the data affirmed to the variable that there is no active participation of the citizens in the democratic process at the grassroots level 77.1% on agreement level with mean value and standard deviation of ($\bar{\chi} = 2.71$, $SD = 1.472$).

Regarding the sixth assertion, about 130 (38.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed, and 89 (26.1%) of the respondents agreed, making an aggregate of 219 (64.2%) of the respondents stated that local government responds rapidly to the concerns raised by her citizens to fulfil her obligations within their jurisdiction. It was contrary to the view of 74 (21.7%) disagreed and 48 (14.1%) of the respondents strongly disagreed. This data representation shows that the local government responds rapidly to the concerns raised by its citizens to fulfil its obligations within its jurisdiction with 219 responses. The mean value and standard deviation for this variable were ($\bar{\chi} = 3.65$, $SD = 1.237$).

In line with the seventh assertion, about 39 (11.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed, and 75 (21.9%) of the respondents agreed, making an aggregate of 114 (33.4%) of the respondents stated that there is the involvement of the citizens in the planning and execution of governments policies at the grassroots level. It was contrary to the view of 128 (35.5%) disagreed and 99 (29.1%) of the respondents strongly disagreed. This data representation shows that the citizens are not involved in the planning and executing government policies at the grassroots level, with 227 responses. The mean value and standard deviation for this variable were ($\bar{\chi} = 3.36$, $SD = 1.341$).

The respondents' opinions were sought on citizens serving as a watchdog to the local government administration level operation in the study area. Concerning the ninth assertion, 109 (27.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed, and 126 (36.9%) of the respondents agreed. It

was contrary to the view of 51 (14.9%) who disagreed and 55 (16.3%) of the respondents who strongly disagreed. The analytical implication of the data affirmed to the variable that the citizens serve as a watchdog to the operation of local government administration at the grassroots level 64.6% on agreement level with mean value and standard deviation of ($\bar{\chi} = 3.76$, $SD = 1.265$).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that the involvement of the people and their orientation should be inculcated in the local government to actually allow people to develop their community. Concerted efforts should be geared towards ensuring the active involvement and participation of the local populace in the development of their own community. This can be achieved via the involvement of the citizens in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of policy that affects them.

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