

Autonomy and Local Capacity: An Analysis of the Performance Profile of EDO State Local Government Councils (June 1999 to December 2006)

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Abstract: Autonomy and performance are the recurrent themes in contemporary local government discourse. This study examines the revenue profile and capacity disposition of the local government councils in Edo state from 1999-2006. Empirical evidence from the study suggests that capacity for the local government councils to grow even in the face of rising revenue is inhibited by the deployment of centrally and locally derived resources for bureaucratic ends like salaries, wages, training, touring advances and other related overhead expenditure. The study concludes on the basis of empirical evidence that for meaningful autonomy and development to take root, the gap between internally generated revenue and statutory allocation as well as that between recurrent and capital appropriation which are the main features of local government councils in Edo state must be reversed.

Key words: Infra-sovereign, ultra-sovereign, bureaucratic appropriation, overdeveloped, vertical departmentalist, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The quest for local democracy and the need to erect an autonomous local government tier as a true foundation for a new democratic order in Nigeria has become so popular and fashionable that it consumed the attention of leading scholars of grass root governance (Ola, 1996; Ikelegbe, 2005; Imhanlahimi and Ikeayibe, 2009; Ebohon, 1995; Aghayere, 1995). In his inaugural lecture, Ola (1996) delivered before an informed University of Benin audience, two central tasks were attempted, namely; a philosophical rationalization of local democracy as a necessary condition for consolidating democratic order in transitional society and a philosophical rationalization of local autonomy as a genuine path to local participation and local development.

However while these thought provoking rationalizations are germane, the researchers omitted the vital tasks of capturing local existential realities on the basis of scientifically adduced body of empirical evidence to give his philosophical propositions a scientific status and authority. In this study, effort is made to capture the resource profile of the local government council in Edo state with a view to accepting or questioning the status of the concept and practice of autonomy in the contemporary Nigerian local government system. In doing

this, we shall locate a flexible conceptual framework of local autonomy, identify the revenue profile of local councils and examine the structural, institutional and executive constraints that make only infra-sovereign local government system a reality for now.

The concept of autonomy revisited: Contemporary discourse on autonomy in the Nigerian context has elevated the concept to some form of political fashions. While on one hand, top functionaries of the three tiers of government have treated the concept with mutual mistrust and suspicion as it affects the practice of inter-governmental relations, the leaders of the ethnic nationalities and regional blocks have tended to transpose the concept to the realm of ideology on the other hand. This can be deployed to justify, the popular quest for sovereign national conference and even a legitimization ideology for separatist claims by the ruling ethnic or zonal elites.

The concept has attained such popular status that a discussion of its multifaceted character must form the point of departure. Autonomy has both economic and political ramification. It could imply the independence of the economic infrastructure of the lower level of government on a higher level of government. It may also mean the independence of the political structures and

institutions of a lower level of government. Such patterns of inter-governmental relations can take any of the forms discussed as:

Autarkic/ultra-sovereign relationship: The political configuration of this relational model in inter governmental relations is the emergence of sovereign entity (local government) within a sovereign nation state (central government). This is conceptually contradictory. Economically, it also means the existence of units or levels of governments where economies are strong and resilient enough to support all local economic needs as structured by the inter play of the forces of demand and supply. This type of autonomy of units within the larger frame is a conceptual postulate that lacks any counterpart in reality.

Extraverted/vertical departmentalist relationship: In this conceptual model, external rather than internal political forces determine the logic of power relationship. In this context, local political structures and institutions are contrived and manipulated by extra-locale or central political interests to optimize the interest of the centre. Authoritative decisions flow from appropriate central departments or ministries to corresponding local departments for implementation at the grassroots. Economically, the local economy is dependent on the centre for marketing of cheap raw materials while at the same time relegating the locale to a market for highly priced finished goods. In other words, the law of motion of the local political economy is driven by the logic of central-urban interests.

Infra-sovereign relationship: The 1st two models or archetypes are two extreme of typical inter-governmental relational continuum. In real life practice of the modern local government system, the acceptable models must find accommodation a little to the right of the autarkic/ultra-sovereign model or a little to the left of the extraverted/vertical departmentalist model. This can guide in configuring a popular federal-state-local relationship that can give a measure of autonomy to the various tiers. The crisis of contemporary Nigerian federalism derives from the quest by the federating units for a self-reliant status that guarantees a form of infra-sovereign status which recognizes and promotes the ultra-sovereign authority and status of the federal level.

POST-WAR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN TRANSITION

The evolutionary path of the Nigerian local government system from the pre-colonial to colonial

period has been well documented (Egonmwan, 1984) and should therefore, not delay or pad the discussion in this study. Suffice here to note that during the period under review, the practice of local government was hazy, fuzzy, uncoordinated and hardly recognized by the constitution of the state. To worsen the plight of the local government system, the period 1967-70 was devoted by Gowon administration to the prosecution of the Nigerian civil war while the immediate post-war years were devoted to governmental reforms.

However, the Murtala Muhammed/Olusegun Obasanjo administration recognized that to rebuild a superstructure of state threatened by war, one must necessarily and reasonably begin at the foundation (Ola, 1996). No wonder, after the creation of the 19 state structures, the next agenda of government was the reform of local government system. The 1975-76 local government reform of the administration set an irreversible trend and a break-through described as the Magna Charta of Nigeria's local government.

The spirit of the Dasuki report, the political bureau report and the Babangida initiative of 1988 which saw the introduction of presidential system to the local government level, sustained the tempo and spirit of the Magna Charta. As has been observed elsewhere, the 1976 reform ensured a place for local government in the draft constitution:

Local government is for the first time enshrined in the constitution... the system of local government is guaranteed and accordingly the government of every state shall ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils

Local government has always been undermined in Nigerian politics. While presidentialism was introduced to the federal and state government levels in 1979, it was by January 1992, the federal government started to introduce the system at the local government. With this development, the erstwhile arrangement which recognized parliamentary system at the local level by fusing legislative and executive powers side by side separation of powers at the state and federal levels was jettisoned. The local government legislative council henceforth was recognized as the law-making organ while the chairman ceased to be member of such council. But then the elected chairman with his vice and supervisory councilors constitute the executive arm of the local government. These developments notwithstanding, the judicial arm of the local government has not arrived because the state still controls the customary and native courts to avert the

danger of covert politicization of the judicial system at the grass roots. Over the years, however Nigerian local government council system could be said to have experienced some transformation although, recent developments continue to cast pessimistic future of an imminent decline in the fortunes of the 3rd tier. This trend has not been helped by the politics of democratic transition at the state level. State governors fashioned the erosion of the democratic rights of the local electorate with the appointment of transition chairmen and transition councilors. In addition, a proposed constitutional amendment seeks to erode the local government of a 3rd tier status and make it an extension of state power. However, military rule has addressed the issue of local government councils' creation alongside state creation. In recent years, the issue of autonomy has occupied the centre stage of local government discourse and reforms efforts. How have local councils performed? How much resource is at their disposal for mobilization for the task of nurturing and erecting a self-reliant and infra-sovereign local government system? Currently, Edo state government has 18 local government councils as shown in Table 1.

STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

At the apex of the local government authority structure is an executive chairman who heads the executive arm of the local government system. He is elected to office on the platform of a political party to serve a term of office prescribed by state authorities. The chairman is the chief executive in the local government system. He is therefore, the head of the executive arm of the local government.

The chairman is assisted by a vice whose schedule is determined from time to time by the executive chairman. As an elected officer, the vice chairman enjoys a single card with the chairman. Immediately, below the chairman and the vice chairman in the executive arm is the secretary to the council who is an appointee of the chairman. The secretary is the head and custodian of the implementation machinery of the local government council. In the administrative setup, the head of service who is also the head of personnel service. In addition, he is the chief accounting officer of the council and he is drawn from the unified local government service. He is a regular civil servant charged with the responsibility for directing and overseeing other departmental heads and operatives in the implementation of local government policies. His tenure like those of his heads of department outlives any particular council administration.

Table 1: Edo state local government councils

Local government council	Headquarters	Population
Akoko-Edo	Igarra	123,689
Egor	Uselu	217,912
Esan central	Irrua	78,264
Esan North East	Uromi	88,678
Esan South East	Ubiaja	81,728
Esan West	Ekpoma	75,832
Etsako central	Fugar	41,081
Etsako East	Agenebode	97,316
Etsako West	Auchi	126,112
Igbeben	Igbeben	47,611
Ikpoba-Okha	Idogbo	230,792
Oredo	Benin city	352,918
Orhionmwon	Abudu	147,537
Owan East	Afize	90,927
Owan West	Sabongida ora	70,374
Ovia North East	Okada	121,769
Ovia South West	Iguobazuwa	80,692
Uhunmwode	Ehor	98,767
Total		2,172,005

Accessed from councils' public records by the researcher

The legislative arm: The legislative arm is the law-making arm of the council proper. This arm is separated from the executive. The chairman, vice chairman and the secretary are not members of council (the legislature). This makes for separation of power in line with the executive presidential profile of the local government system.

The local government council areas are divided into wards of 10-12 as the case may be depending on the peculiarities of each council by way of geographical terrain, contiguity, landmass, population and political considerations. Each ward is represented by a candidate, who is normally recognized as councilor. The councilor is the elected representative of the ward in the legislative arm.

Finance: Finance is the most contentious issue in the Nigerian local government system. This is because funding must be adequate for meaningful development at the grassroots to take place. The aspects of finance covered in this study are revenue profile and expenditure profile.

Revenue profile of councils: There is no doubt that local government revenue profile has been on the increase in recent times in Edo state like elsewhere in Nigeria. Funding patterns have tremendously reversed from zero allocation for oredo to as high as N115,000,000 a month and an average monthly federal statutory receipt of N50,000,000.00 for a small revenue size local government council.

One disturbing pattern of the revenue profile is its structure that tends to make council over dependent on the federal government statutory allocation as shows the Table 2. The staff distribution between senior and junior officers appears proportional. This is quite unlike the state

Table 2: Staff distribution of local government councils in Edo state

Local government	1999	2000	2001	2004
Akoko-Edo	230	281	291	282
Egor	256	189	255	219
Esan central	169	137	273	301
Esan North East	685	155	232	235
Esan South East	221	121	160	295
Esan West	224	167	183	176
Etsako central	120	99	155	257
Etsako East	152	111	153	311
Etsako West	315	268	267	257
Igueben	147	110	280	250
Ikpoba-Okha	211	153	171	271
Oredo	271	190	187	271
Orhionmwon	372	291	328	318
Owan East	211	160	195	292
Owan West	227	165	190	196
Ovia North East	242	209	218	216
Ovia South West	204	193	198	268
Uhunmwode	260	178	206	219
Benin traditional council	140	151	56	80
Local government service commission	78	80	89	103

Accessed from councils' public records by researcher

Table 3: Gender distribution of staff of local government councils in Edo state

Years	Total	Senior staff		Junior staff	
		Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1999	4263	944 (22.14)	661 (15.50)	1982 (46.40)	676 (15.86)
2000	3406	814 (23.89)	693 (20.34)	1337 (39.25)	562 (16.50)
2001	4112	1073 (26.09)	851 (20.69)	1570 (38.18)	618 (15.02)
2004	4866	1456 (29.90)	1108 (22.80)	1586 (32.59)	116 (14.30)

Annual reports of Edo state government service commission

level where distribution showed a skewness in favour of the intermediate staff and low level of senior and junior staff. The staff distribution between male and females indicates that the commission is gender sensitive as far as the sex distribution of the senior staff is concerned (Table 3).

However, this is not reflected in sex distribution of junior staff. We have a disproportionately large male junior to female distribution. For example in 2004, the male junior staff constituted a whopping 47.5% while the female in this category constituted 14.7%. The reason for this disparity between male and female at the junior staff level is not clear but it is not unlikely that the high drop out of girls from primary and secondary schools may be responsible.

Local capacity and performance: In this study, three indicators of capacity disposition are adopted for purposes of analysis. The indicators are:

- Revenue profile
- Local executive capacity
- The structure and institutional context of inter governmental relations, especially as it affects freedom of action and room for manoeuvre at the local level

Table 4: Internal revenue contribution as percentage of total revenue

Local government council	1999	2000	2001	2006	Difference (%)
Akoko-Edo	2.720	1.780	1.13	1.200	-126.7
Egor	6.300	2.790	2.92	2.400	-162.5
Esan central	0.001	1.250	1.82	1.200	99.9
Esan North East	3.460	2.440	2.16	4.000	13.5
Esan South East	1.600	1.100	0.80	0.600	-166.7
Esan West					
Etsako central	3.150	0.400	0.370	0.700	-350.0
Etsako East	0.001	0.910	0.150	0.400	99.8
Etsako West	3.770	4.090	4.050	2.500	-50.8
Igueben	1.080	0.880	1.500	0.800	-35.0
Ikpoba-Okha	4.900	4.070	4.940	1.700	-188.2
Oredo	39.09	29.80	22.40	8.300	-370.9
Orhionmwon	2.220	1.630	0.800	0.300	-640.0
Owan East	1.890	1.250	2.080	3.800	-50.3
Owan West	1.260	1.830	1.320	0.600	-110.0
Ovia North East	3.530	1.610	3.690	0.500	-606.0
Ovia South West	3.190	3.620	3.380	0.900	-254.4
Uhunmwode	0.920	0.440	5.900	0.800	-15.0
Average	4.652	3.523	3.663	2.067	-125.1

Computed by the researcher from the returns of the 18 local government councils to Edo state, house of assembly committee on investigation of revenue profile of local government councils in Edo state for the period covered

Table 5: Contribution (%) to Local government's finances, 1993-2006

Sources	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2006
Federal revenue	93.4	88.8	89.5	91.5	95.5	93.8	95.3	96.0
State revenue	0.3	0.6	0.7	0.4	0.9	0.6	0.5	0.5
Local government	5.1	8.7	8.3	7.9	3.5	5.6	4.6	3.5
Other funds	1.2	2.0	1.5	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Imhanlahimi and Ikeayibe (2009)

The preference of local capacity analysis is rooted in the logic of performance disposition. In the discussion of local capacity, we shall analyze revenue profile and expenditure in order to assess the extent to which the local councils can generate revenue independently without approaching the centre for assistance.

In doing this capacity analysis (Table 4 and 5) are generated. Table 4 and 5 are captured and analyzed in couplet for revenue profile analysis while (Table 6 and 7) are also captured and analyzed in couplet for expenditure profile analysis.

Table 4 shows that average internal revenue contribution to revenue receipt by 17 councils for 1999-2001 and 2006 stood at 4.7, 3.5, 3.7 and 2.1%, respectively while the internal revenue performance fell by -125.1% from 4.7% in 1999 and 2.1% for 2006. Table 5 shows high federal revenue performance profile between 1993 and 2006.

However, state revenue contribution is consistently poor while local government internally generated revenue which stood at 5.1% of total system revenue in 1993 fell to 3.5% in 2006. The implication of this falling local profile is that the councils are suffering capacity depreciation.

Table 6: Average local government council expenditure profile in percentage

Local government council	Items/ expenditure	1999-2001 (%)	2004-2006 (%)
Akoko-Edo	Capital	30.39	32.73
	Recurrent	69.61	65.27
Egor	Capital	49.20	46.20
	Recurrent	50.80	53.80
Esan central	Capital	20.85	33.30
	Recurrent	79.15	66.70
Esan North East	Capital	28.70	28.85*
	Recurrent	71.30	64.15
Esan South East	Capital	24.60	51.57
	Recurrent	75.40	64.15
Esan West	Capital	9.00	32.8*
	Recurrent	71.00	66.90
Etsako Central	Capital	52.8*	40.6*
	Recurrent	42.70	59.00
Etsako East	Capital	52.80	33.05
	Recurrent	47.20	66.94
Etsako West	Capital	34.30	39.51
	Recurrent	65.70	60.49
Igueben	Capital	39.20	39.28
	Recurrent	60.80	60.56
Ikpoba-Okha	Capital	34.90	45.83
	Recurrent	65.10	54.17
Oredo	Capital	15.60	36.00
	Recurrent	84.40	64.00
Orhionmwon	Capital	25.10	40.03
	Recurrent	74.90	59.97
Owan East	Capital	49.20	51.19
	Recurrent	50.80	48.81
Owan West	Capital	55.50	55.26
	Recurrent	44.50	44.62
Ovia North East	Capital	38.20	41.32
	Recurrent	61.80	58.68
Ovia South West	Capital	51.02	39.66*
	Recurrent	48.98	59.24
Uhunmwode	Capital	30.30	42.63
	Recurrent	69.70	57.37

*Difference due to transfer to GRB (General Reserve Balance). Computed by the researcher from the returns of the 18 local government councils to state house of assembly committee on the spending and revenue of councils, 1999-2006

The pitfall revenue profile as indicator of resource availability for development is that it tells very little about fund utilization for development as well as capacity building at the grass roots.

Table 6 captures the fund utilization in the Edo state Local government system. The general trend is towards bureaucratic deployment of resources to the neglect of capital development project. On the average, recurrent deployment accounts for about two-thirds of councils' expenditure while capital spending accounts for about one-third. This pattern of expenditure is replicated by the national local government expenditure profile as shown in Table 7.

Local capacity and inter-governmental relations: The choice of inter-governmental relations as a measure of capacity index derives from the fact that structural and institutional context can limit the degree to which revenue profile can be a potent force in driving local development

Table 7: LGS' recurrent expenditure in relation to capital expenditure (%) in Nigeria, 1993-2006

Years	Recurrent expenditure	Capital expenditure
1993	71.8	28.2
1994	77.9	22.1
1995	72.8	27.1
1996	72.5; 72.3	27.7
1997	72.5	27.5
1998	58.6	41.4
1999	68.9	31.1
2000	61.0	39.0
2001	71.6	28.4
2002	73.4	26.4
2003	58.5	41.5
2004	64.1	35.9
2005	63.7	36.3
2006	59.8	40.2

Nigerian government sources (1999, 2001, 2003, 2006); Imhanlahimi and Ikeayibe (2009)

agenda. For obvious reasons, centrally imposed rather than people oriented projects could be implemented to stunt the development of local capacity and hence, meaningful local autonomy. For instance, constitutional and institutional systemic characteristics tend to impact on local capacity and local development. Such characteristic can have implications for the ability of councils to assert, conceptualize, package and executive development projects.

Traditionally, the local government is a structural derivative of the centre-federal or state but its political and administrative powers are derived from local electorate not from the central government. Under the 1999 constitution, the state government determines the structure and functions of the local government. Under the 2002, Local government laws of Edo state, the Local government councils suffer certain constraints that can reduce the level of autonomy which the councils can express.

For instance, the key professional and administrative personnel in the system are staff of the unified local government service and hence are controlled from the centre by the local government service commission which is constituted by the state government. Thus, the council has no control over appointment, promotion, transfer and discipline of its key professional and administrative officers. In addition, the state government must approve key capital projects exceeding N2,000,000 before councils can execute such projects as at 2006.

LOCAL EXECUTIVE CAPACITY

An analysis of local capacity is not complete without a discussion of the executive profile of the local government system. The explanation that suggests itself for the relevance of this analysis is that revenue profile either externally or locally generated cannot in itself drive

development in the absence of human factor in the development process. Such critical human input in technical and engineering services, financial and administrative skill, health, etc. that require high level academic and professional training in appropriate discipline must be in adequate supply to the system. The field survey reveals the distribution of selected academic and professional skills in the Edo state local government system. It was found that councils have a reasonable number of senior engineering, technical, accounting, medical and administrative staff. However, the absence of COREN registered engineers, chartered accountant, quantity surveyors, cast serious doubts as to the quality of development projects, the cost of such projects and the quality of financial management that may not predispose the project to abandonment. Not even one local government council had professionally qualified staff in these key areas. The present administration for instance, arbitrarily deployed less qualified staff to high profile positions in treasury department for mere political considerations. Such was the case in 1999 when the Igbinedion administration dropped all the treasurers to administrative posts and replaced them with less qualified non-degree holding staff just to satisfy some political interests. The absence of such vital skills limit the degree to which the local councils can take initiatives independent of the state without running the risk of taking poor project development decisions.

CONCLUSION

Leys (1976)'s concept of overdeveloped post-colonial state has a bearing on the patterns of development in the Edo state local government system. Empirical evidence from this study suggest that a vast proportion of centrally and locally derived resources is deployed for bureaucratic ends like salaries and wages, training, touring advances, newspaper and related overhead expenditure. While bureaucratic appropriation can propel development of executive capacity and needed for accelerated transformation, evidence suggested by staff is that such appropriation are not actually directed at capacity development but for training workshops that have no development relevance or tours that are not made or vehicles that are not repaired. The gap between bureaucratic appropriation and capital appropriation as well as that between eternally generated revenue and

statutory allocation as inputs into the system's total revenue/expenditure profiles tell little story because the percentage of waste built into capital projects and the cost of collecting internal revenue are not easily discernible.

However, the gaps have reduced resource flow for the local development programmes thereby creating a crisis of underdevelopment at the local level. The extent to which local council can assert her autonomy would depend on the reduction of these gaps, otherwise vicious circle of underdevelopment will not only take root but equally make the vision of meaningful local government autonomy a mirage.

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