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CENTRE-PERIPHERY APPROACH TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The centre-periphery approach to local governance has become one of the challenges facing Nigeria's local government administrative system. The local government areas in Nigeria were created as the third tier of government and a government for developing the grassroots. However, this has failed to be the case due to the constant undue interference of the other tiers of government, making the local government a mere appendage and dependent entity on the federal and state governments in the country. The centre-periphery model was adopted to analyze this dependency and its underdeveloped status. The study, therefore, recommended that for the local government to be genuinely seen as a third tier of government in the country, it must enjoy genuine autonomy. Furthermore, the centre-periphery approach to government must be expunged and discontinued, as it is a crucial step towards improving local governance.

Keywords: Centre-Periphery Approach, Local Governance, Nigeria.

Introduction

In Nigeria, local governance represents the most ancient form of administration, predating the introduction of other contemporary governance structures. This particular mode of governance was extensively examined and employed throughout Nigeria's colonial and post-colonial periods. Throughout the years, it has experienced numerous reforms. The local government reform initiated by Udoji in 1976 stands as the most extensive, with numerous elements persisting within the contemporary local government administrative framework.

While local governance was established to enhance governmental engagement with grassroots communities and foster active participation in state decision-making processes, the current situation reflects a stark contrast. Many local government areas in Nigeria are experiencing significant neglect and inadequate attention from higher levels of government. This predicament can be traced to several critical challenges, including unwarranted interference from federal and state authorities, as well as the local governments' excessive dependence on these tiers for their operational viability (Akhakpe & Fatile, 2019).

The inadequate focus and developmental shortcomings of the local government areas, coupled with insufficient infrastructural advancement and a scarcity of employment opportunities, have compelled numerous citizens of the state to pursue rural-urban migration. This phenomenon has resulted in the overpopulation of urban centres, consequently diverting governmental attention away from the confines of the local government area (Igbokwe, 2019).

The aspiration to successfully localise governance and establish local government areas as a genuine third tier of government has remained unfulfilled over the years. This has also complicated the pursuit of sustainable economic and infrastructural development necessary for effective local governance. Achieving effective local governance is unattainable when the administration of local government areas relies on federal and state governments for economic and infrastructural development. Consequently, it is reasonable to contend that local governments do not truly function as independent third tiers of governance, but rather serve as extensions of the federal and state authorities (Anazodo, 2018).

Igbokwe (2019) posited that prior to the establishment of British colonial governance in Nigeria, numerous local communities and villages had developed their own administrative policies and legal frameworks to effectively manage their indigenous administrative systems. These local communities thrived independently, not reliant on any overarching governmental authority to fulfil and maintain their requirements.

He further articulated that the numerous local government reforms intended to foster self-reliance and economic sustainability within the local government areas have not achieved their intended success. Instead, they have resulted in an increased dependency on federal and state governments for the fundamental necessities required for the effective administrative functioning of local governance in these regions. Furthermore, this has validated the subordinate role assigned to local governance within the nation.

In order for local governance to fulfil its foundational objectives and for the governmental presence to resonate effectively within the communities of Nigeria, it is imperative to implement suitable technological advancements within the agricultural sector, which serves as the cornerstone for the local populace. This initiative should encompass the establishment of skill acquisition and development centres, an elevation in literacy rates, the promotion of awareness regarding rural opportunities, the provision of technical services and assistance, and the delivery of essential amenities such as a reliable road network, consistent electricity supply, modern healthcare facilities, rural markets, model schools, and farm settlements, among other critical components.

Regrettably, the current landscape of local government areas reflects a pervasive centre-periphery model of operation. This paradigm has resulted in the concentration of significant developmental projects within municipalities and urban centres, while local government areas experience profound and systemic neglect. Furthermore, this situation is exacerbated by the excessive influence exerted by federal and state governments over local government areas. Despite the constitution's clear stipulation regarding the autonomy of local governments, we continue to witness persistent political and economic meddling in their affairs. In pursuit of this objective, it is essential to analyse the challenges encountered by local governance in Nigeria through the lens of the centre-periphery model.

Statement of the Problem

Notwithstanding the constitutional acknowledgement of local governments as the third tier of governance in Nigeria, their capacity to promote grassroots development is markedly limited. The relationship between the centre and the periphery, which fundamentally positions the federal government—and by extension, state governments—at the nucleus of

authority, has persistently diminished the ability of local governments to function independently and address local needs with efficacy.

Local governments in Nigeria frequently exhibit a deficiency in financial autonomy, administrative control, and the capacity for independent decision-making. Disbursements from the federation account are often subject to delays, misappropriation, or interception by state governments, resulting in significant financial constraints for local councils. Moreover, the overreach of state executives—especially through the implementation of caretaker committees in lieu of elected local councils—subverts the foundational tenets of democratic governance and the engagement of the community.

The prevailing centralised authority has engendered a disparity in development, wherein the periphery—predominantly rural communities—experiences deficiencies in infrastructure, subpar service provision, and constrained socio-economic prospects. The inherent structural imbalance within the centre-periphery framework not only suppresses local innovation and accountability but also cultivates a sense of political apathy among citizens who perceive themselves as disconnected from the governance process.

In light of these challenges, it is essential to scrutinise the implications of the centre-periphery model on the operational capacity, efficacy, and developmental contributions of local governments in Nigeria. Unless we confront these structural and institutional impediments, initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive and sustainable local development are likely to produce only marginal outcomes.

Research Questions

1. How has the centre-periphery relationship influenced the autonomy and effectiveness of local governments in Nigeria?
2. In what ways do federal and state-level interventions affect the administrative and financial independence of local governments?
3. What are the implications of the centre-periphery structure on grassroots participation and service delivery at the local level?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of the centre-periphery relationship on local governance in Nigeria. Other objectives are to:

1. Analyze the nature of the centre-periphery relationship within Nigeria's federal structure.
2. Assess the extent to which central and state-level control affects the autonomy and performance of local governments.
3. Evaluate the impact of this relationship on service delivery and development outcomes at the grassroots level.

Conceptual Underpinnings

Despite the constitutional recognition of local governments as the third tier of governance in Nigeria, their ability to foster grassroots development is significantly constrained. The dynamic between the central authority and its surrounding regions, which fundamentally situates the federal government—and, by extension, state governments—at the core of power,

has consistently undermined the capacity of local governments to operate autonomously and effectively meet the needs of their communities.

Local governments in Nigeria often demonstrate a lack of financial independence, administrative authority, and the ability to make autonomous decisions. Disbursements from the federation account frequently encounter delays, misappropriation, or interception by state governments, leading to considerable financial limitations for local councils. Furthermore, the excessive authority exercised by state executives—particularly through the establishment of caretaker committees instead of elected local councils—undermines the essential principles of democratic governance and community involvement.

The dominant centralised authority has created an imbalance in development, where the periphery—mainly rural communities—faces shortcomings in infrastructure, inadequate service delivery, and limited socio-economic opportunities. The fundamental structural disparity within the centre-periphery framework not only stifles local innovation and accountability but also fosters a sense of political disengagement among citizens who view themselves as estranged from the governance process.

Given these challenges, it is crucial to examine the ramifications of the centre-periphery model on the operational capacity, effectiveness, and developmental roles of local governments in Nigeria. Failure to address these structural and institutional barriers will likely result in initiatives designed to promote inclusive and sustainable local development yielding only minimal results.

Centre-Periphery Model

This theory enjoys greater prominence among scholars aligned with Marxist thought, including figures such as Andre Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Samir Amin. The theory was introduced to analyse the structural relationships between urban centres (core) and rural communities (periphery) within a specific nation. This framework is equally relevant to the dynamics between advanced capitalist societies and underdeveloped or developing societies in the global context. In this study, the state and federal government are conceptualised as the core, whereas the government is regarded as the periphery.

This study employs the centre-periphery model, positing that the global production and distribution framework is structured in accordance with the dynamics between core developed societies and peripheral developing societies. This reflects the dynamics within a nation where the mechanisms of production and the allocation of wealth are determined at the central urban hubs, while the peripheral local government areas suffer from neglect and a dearth of developmental focus.

Amin (1976), in his examination of the centre-periphery model, posited that the phenomenon of underdevelopment in a specific segment of society is not rooted in tradition. The rationale behind this phenomenon lies in the established processes that govern the evolution of capitalism, primarily originating from the central capitalist nations, and the persistent replication of this paradigm across the globe. He contended that the theory privileges core capitalist nations, wherein market dynamics dictate economic growth, and posits that such expansion should be actively promoted on a global scale across various countries.

Advocates of the centre-periphery model argue that capitalism facilitates the advancement of traditional and economically lagging states by establishing businesses and ventures in developing and underdeveloped areas, thereby aiding them in achieving swift economic growth, in contrast to the conditions found in non-capitalist economies (Canon, 2019).

This model's applicability extends to both global and national contexts. In the context of the global landscape, the model is examined through the lens of the ongoing evolution of technologically advanced capitalist economies in contrast to the developing economies that have largely remained underdeveloped and reliant on their developed counterparts. The manifestation of this reality on a national scale is evident in Nigeria, where a pronounced developmental disparity exists between the federal and state governments and the local governments. Although the mineral resources utilised for the advancement of the urban centre are sourced from rural areas, the urban centres, supported by federal and state governments, have consistently experienced significant economic and infrastructural growth. Conversely, the local government, situated on the periphery, finds itself entangled in a state of neglect and underdevelopment, characterised by elevated levels of poverty, unemployment, and a growing marginalisation of its citizens.

Methodology

The study adopted a document analytic method of data collection and analysis. This methodology is an arm of the qualitative method of data collection and analysis, and it requires the review and analysis of relevant literature, media reports, academic journals, newspapers and magazine publications, and seminar presentations related to the subject matter, which basically deals with the centre-peripheral approach to local governance in Nigeria.

Centre- Periphery Model and Contradiction of Development

On general, growth should have been more focused on rural settlements (periphery) because a significant portion of a nation's mineral resources are located in these places. It is ironic that rural areas in Nigeria that are directly under the jurisdiction of local governance receive less attention from the government in terms of development. On the other hand, urban centres and cities (core) receive greater attention and development in terms of economic and infrastructure development.

This is the same scenario that is replicated at the global level, where a significant portion of the mineral resources and raw materials that are required by the industries in the advanced capitalist economies are located in developing economies such as Nigeria. One would have expected the developing economies to have been more developed given that they possess all of the resources that are necessary to accomplish this feat. However, ironically, the advanced capitalist economies, which are dependent on the developing economies for the supply of many of their raw materials, are growing every day, while these developing economies are dependent on their growth, which makes them a peripheral dependent nation in the global system.

Evolution of Local Governance in Nigeria

Emeka (2018) posited that the development of local governance in Nigeria has its roots in the colonial era of the nation. He noted that prior to this period, the nation was governed by

indigenous authorities who transformed and introduced an indirect rule system across various regions and communities within the country. Furthermore, local governance has undergone a series of transformations, progressing through various iterations before arriving at its current state, in which the constitution recognises local government primarily as an administrative entity. The management aspect. The constitution now recognises the local government as the third tier of administration, functioning as a governing body at the grassroots level.

Osaghe (2019) posits that numerous reforms have been proposed to enhance the efficacy of local governance. Nevertheless, those engaged in these reforms have not adequately addressed the complexities surrounding the concentration of power and resources within the federal government in a multi-ethnic society, which has significantly hindered the essential development of local government areas. He further observed that despite the various reforms implemented within Nigeria's local government administrative framework, the administrators of local government areas have not been endowed with absolute authority. Consequently, the absence of this critical empowerment renders the prospect of attaining significant development at the local governance level an elusive aspiration, one that is unlikely to materialise.

Suberu (2020), in his examination of the evolution of local government administration in Nigeria and its accomplishments, observed that among the various reforms implemented within the local government framework, the year 1976 is particularly significant as it facilitated the establishment of a democratically elected local government system in the nation. He articulated that the reform established the foundation for a cohesive system, systematic fund distribution to local government areas, and the implementation of periodic elections, among other aspects. He arrived at the conclusion that, notwithstanding these significant accomplishments, local governance in Nigeria continues to be a mere reflection of its potential, remaining reliant and subordinate to the other two tiers of government.

Centre-Periphery Model and Challenges of Local Governance in Nigeria

Anazodo (2019) posits that leadership represents a critical challenge within the realm of governance in Nigeria. Inadequate leadership has emerged as the most significant obstacle to the anticipated progress of Nigeria, which is often regarded as the giant of Africa. Nonetheless, this predicament appears to be particularly evident within the realm of local governance in the nation, as numerous efforts to address the developmental shortcomings of local communities have not produced significant outcomes due to the nature of leadership that has been either elected or appointed to oversee the operations of local government areas. Osakwe (2019), in alignment with Anazodo's perspective, contended that the local government functions as a subordinate entity to the state governments, wherein the Governor or chief administrator dictates the actions to be taken in each local government area. This situation has been exacerbated by the flawed provisions in the national constitution that inadvertently established a joint account between the state and its local government units. Such arrangements afford Governors excessive authority to oversee and manipulate the chairpersons of local governments, thereby diminishing their capacity for effective leadership and perpetuating a cycle of political allegiance that obstructs the anticipated progress of local communities.

Nkah (2019) argues that the centre-periphery approach to governance has emerged as a critical challenge and burden for local government areas in the country, subsequently impacting their anticipated development and the promotion of effective governance at the local level. He further observed that, as long as the federal and state governments maintain a direct or indirect influence over local governance in the country, the local government areas will persist in functioning as a periphery to the core – the federal and state governments – and their developmental progress will remain stifled and constrained.

Central-Periphery Model and Local Government Sustainable Development

Although the problem of ineffective leadership is often cited as a primary factor contributing to the stagnation of local government areas in Nigeria, an alternative perspective posits that, regardless of other influences, the local government administrative framework can attain only minimal progress under a truly democratic and forward-thinking leadership. Such leadership must demonstrate exceptional qualities of vision, and only when this is realised can the sustainability of any resultant development be contemplated.

Osborne (2019) contends that regardless of the calibre of leadership tasked with managing the local government administrative framework in Nigeria, the prevailing centre-periphery governance model, which positions local government areas subordinate to the federal and state authorities, will inevitably undermine and obstruct the potential for sustaining any developmental progress realised at the local level. In pursuit of this objective, he argues for the necessity of bestowing authentic autonomy upon local government administrations within the nation, both in principle and in execution, thereby allowing them to function with a degree of independence comparable to that of the federal and state governments.

Gaebler (2019) posits that for local government areas in Nigeria to attain sustainable development, it is imperative to embrace the tenets of public management. Central to this governance paradigm is a mission-driven approach, fostering competitive governance, advancing human capital development, enhancing infrastructural growth, implementing people-oriented public policies, and ensuring result-oriented governance. Furthermore, it is essential to dismantle the constraints of the center-periphery dynamic that exists between local governments and other tiers of government.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Building upon the academic insights offered in this study, it is evident that the local government administrative system plays a pivotal role in the nation's quest for sustainable development. The involvement of local government in fostering political mobilisation, encouraging grassroots citizen engagement, and enhancing accountability in governance is of paramount importance. Nonetheless, the successful execution of these essential responsibilities is contingent upon the local government areas being granted authentic political and economic autonomy, akin to that of the other levels of government. It is imperative that we deconstruct the hierarchical framework of governance that exists between local authorities and other levels of government in order to realise this objective.

The research highlights a troubling matter: local government administration in Nigeria is contending with the challenge of undue political and economic interference from other levels of government. The various tiers persistently engage in the constitutional matters of the local

government, seeking to exert influence over its leadership, organisational framework, and financial soundness, among other facets. This interference has profoundly obstructed the leadership of local government areas, endangering the potential for effective governance and the realisation of democratic benefits for grassroots citizens.

The study therefore recommends thus:

1. The constitution of the Nigeria should be amended in such a way that local government areas in the country should enjoy similar autonomy like their counterparts in other tiers of government.
2. The existence of centre-periphery approach to governance at the local governance level should be expunged.
3. Periodic elections should be conducted by the National Electoral body rather than the state.
4. The existence of joint account system between the state and local government areas should be expunged from the country's constitution.
5. Local government administration in Nigeria will not be able to address the issue of sustainable rural development unless the country properly addresses the challenges of the local government system in the country.
6. To achieve sustainable rural development in Nigeria, the country must return to true federalism.
7. Transparency, accountability and probity should be the watchword towards achieving economic self-reliance and political autonomy through the local government administrative system in the country.

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