

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA: ENUGU STATE EXPERIENCE, 2015-2023

Chukwuma O. Atu, Emmanuel E. Odeh, Sunday M. Odibo and Henry C. Agbo

Department of Political Science
Renaissance University, Ugbawka, Enugu State

Abstract

Local government administration is a necessary tool for governance and mechanism for socio-political development. According to the fourth schedule of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended, local government exists to fulfil a number of objectives. This study interrogates the nexus between governments at grassroots and socio-political development in South East Nigeria, focusing on Enugu State from 2015 to 2022. The paper argues that local governments in South East, particularly in Enugu State have not justified their mandate in terms of socio-political development. There is wide gap between the expectations of the local people on what local governments should do and what they have actually done. Consequently, the rural dwellers are still yearning for more efficient and effective delivery of social services especially primary healthcare. Relying on quantitative, qualitative data and using structural-functional theory as the theoretical framework the paper concludes that though local governments have not creditably performed in South East Nigeria and Enugu State in particular, that they have recorded some modest achievements in terms of being a training ground for political leaders in spite of some institutional challenges facing them.

Keywords: Local Government, Governance, Development, Social Services Delivery and Rural Dwellers

Introduction

According to Ogunna (2007), local government is a political body that was specifically established by a state's constitution or legislation for the aim of enabling local communities to handle their own affairs within the bounds of the respective legal framework. In accordance with the local government reform of 1976, local government is understood to be a kind of local government that is carried out by representative councils that are legally mandated to exercise particular functions within particular geographic regions. Local government, according to Okoye (2021), guarantees decentralization, effectiveness in governing, and a sense of belonging at the local level. Implicit in this conceptualization is that local government is a form of decentralization through devolution of powers to sub-national units of government.

In all political systems, the need for municipal governments is recognised. As a grassroots government, it bridges the gap between rural people, the state and federal government in the case of Nigeria. Local governments are created for a number of reasons. Firstly, it guarantees that citizens participate democratically in the political process and brings government closer to the people. Secondly, it is intended to be a practical tool for the quick growth of neighbourhood communities. Utilizing both people and material resources, local government is best prepared to deliver local services (Atu, 2010).

It encourages local initiatives and leadership potentials at local level by affording people the opportunity to acquire political skills and experience thereby enabling them pursue successful political career at state and federal levels.

Section 7 of the fourth schedule of the 1999 Constitution specifies the duties of local governments in order to supplement those of the states and the federal government. The main objective for the paper is to investigate the relationship between Enugu State's local government administration and socio-political growth in South East Nigeria from 2015 to 2022.

Socio-political development is a process of social and political transformation of rural communities. Indicators of socio-political development include provision of primary and adult education, agricultural services, environmental sanitation, social inclusion, political participation, healthcare delivery services and etc.(Okoye, 2021). According to (Bolatito and Ibrahim, 2014), the provision of social goods and services at the community level aims to raise rural residents' standard of living. Therefore, the main goal of any local government is to efficiently and effectively provide basic amenities and infrastructure facilities for the people at the local level.

Akwarandu and Idu (2013), in (Okoye, 2021), maintain that local governments being agents of rural development should make use of the funds received from the federal and state governments including the internally generated revenue to better the lives of inhabitants within their areas of jurisdiction through the provision of primary healthcare services, feeder roads, water, environmental sanitation and etc. In addition to being a viable political and administrative organ for socio-political development, local governments also act as training ground for grassroots democracy, which is fundamental to the development entire South East region of Nigeria. The main objective for the paper is to investigate the relationship between Enugu State's local government administration and socio-political growth in South East Nigeria from 2015. Then the specific objectives are:

- (1) To determine how the provision of basic healthcare in Enugu State, South East Nigeria has been impacted by the local government's insufficient budgetary allocation.
- (2) To establish whether governance at the local level has provided a platform for training of political leaders in Enugu State, South East Nigeria from 2015 to 2022.

Akhakpe, Fatile and Igbokwe-Ibeto (2014), state that the necessity to establish local governments everywhere in the globe is to enhance grassroots development. Administration of municipal governments is crucial, however, there are some factors affecting its operations in South East Nigeria over the years. In their opinion, these constraints range from undue interference of the federal and state governments, inadequacy of well-trained and qualified staff, and high rate of corruption among others. Bolatito and Ibrahim, (2014), corroborating this, remarked that local government councils encounter a number of issues and challenges in discharging their statutory functions as exemplified in corruption, unskilled workforce, lack of authority, insufficient funding and improper budget allocation, ineptitude and administrative inefficiency or lack of executive capacity. Also (Enemu, 1999), contended that local government performance is constrained by scarcity of experienced personnel, excessive control by state and federal governments, inadequate funding and corruption among staff. Flowing from this, the paper adopts the following research questions to guide it. (1) Has inadequate budgetary allocation by local government administration affected primary healthcare delivery services in Enugu State, South East Nigeria? (2) Has governance at the local level provided a platform for the training of political leaders in Enugu State, South East Nigeria from 2015 to 2022?

South East Nigeria's Local Government Management and Socio-Political Development

This paper explores the nexus between administration of local government and Enugu State, South East Nigeria is developing from 2015 to 2023. Here is explication of different views of scholars on these concepts and their relationship. Against this background, (Adebayo and Adepoju, 2016), reiterate the obvious connection between local government administration as well as rural development in Nigeria and argue that efficient local government administration is essential for addressing rural development challenges like poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment. To them, effective local government administration can be achieved through, increased citizen participation, improved financial resources and decentralized planning.

Adeyemi (2016) opines that effective local government administration is imperative for promoting grassroots development and finding solution to social and economic problems. He also identifies many challenges facing local government administration in Nigeria, including inadequate funding, corruption, and political interference from higher tiers of government.

Ahmad and Shaheen, (2014), investigated the functions of local government administration in promoting rural improvement in Pakistan. These authors argue that the management of local government is crucial in tackling rural development issues such as poverty, unemployment, and infrastructure development. To improve and strengthen local government administration, they suggested among other things, greater decentralization and more effective citizen engagement.

In support of the forgoing, (Fagbemi, 2020), states that active citizen participation in local government decision-making is essential for advancing socio-economic development and reducing social inequalities. He identifies the problems facing local government administration in Nigeria including corruption, inadequate funding, and political interference

Anifowose and Adeyemi (2016), review the impact of local government authority on sustainable Nigerian rural development and stress that effective local governance is essential for promoting community development and reducing rural poverty. They suggest that successful local government administration can be achieved through decentralization of power, increased citizen participation, and improved local institutional capacity.

The literature reviewed notes that effective local government administration is a fundamental factor in promoting socio-political development and solving social and economic problems. Nevertheless, local government administration faces various challenges connected to institutional capacity, financial resources, and political interference. In order to deal with these challenges, strategies such as decentralization, citizen participation, and institutional capacity building may be effective.

Theoretical Perspective

The paper adopts structural-functional theory to explain the relationship between local government administration and socio-political development. Prominent proponents of the theory include Durkheim (1893), Merton (1949), and Parsons (1951). The theory explains how different components of a society work together to maintain the overall stability and functionality of the society. Contextually grassroots level administration of Enugu State, South East Nigeria this theory can be applied to analyze how different structures and functions of local government work together to promote socio-political development.

The theory assumes that the society is made of interdependent components that co-operate to preserve its symmetry and harmony. Every aspect of society serves a purpose or function that enhances its overall efficiency. Every part of society is interdependent components that co-operate to preserve its symmetry and harmony. Society is in a state of equilibrium, where any disruption or dysfunction in one part of society can affect the functioning of other parts of society.

The theory is relevant in assessing the impact of local government administration on social and political change. This involves examining whether functions of local government contribute to socio-political development of Enugu State, South East Nigeria from 2015 to 2022 and the constraining factors.

Structural-functional theory provides a framework for understanding and analyzing the intricate relationship between local government and socio-political development, and can be a valuable instrument for evaluating and improving the third tier of government. Local government and socio-political advancement are closely connected. The entire socio-political growth of any nation may be significantly influenced by the efficacy and efficiency of local administration. Basic services and the upkeep of law and order, which are necessary elements for fostering socioeconomic growth, are responsibilities of local government.

Providing essential services including healthcare, education, water, and sanitation is one of the key responsibilities of local government. Through these services, local government can enhance the overall living standard of the citizens and help reduce poverty. The theory can be used to evaluate local government functions, such as service delivery and implementation of policies and programs. By identifying the specific functions of local government, the theory can help to identify its strengths and weaknesses.

Research Design

The study used the survey research approach as its research strategy. To (Ogunna, 2003:40), “survey research is a systematic and comprehensive study which involves the collection of data through questionnaires and interviews of various forms.” It involves field research and is primarily concerned with collection and analysis of quantitative data.

Data Collection technique

The paper employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. It means that primary data were obtained using interviews and questionnaire. The qualitative approach made use of documented materials such as textbooks, journals, government/official documents, internet sources and other materials relevant to the research. Consequently, structured questionnaire were used to elicit information from the respondents. Structured questionnaire was employed because of its ability to facilitate data.

Population

Residents of the state's seventeen (17) local government areas, organized into three (3) senatorial districts, namely Enugu North, Enugu East and Enugu West make up the population. According to the 2006 census figures, the population of the State is three million, two hundred and sixty – seven thousand, and eight hundred and thirty – seven (3,267,837).

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

In view of the largeness of the population, it became imperative to select a manageable and representative size. To this end, the sample size was established using the Taro Yamane formula. Therefore, the formula is as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

where n = Sample size

N = population

I = Constant

e = Error margin $(0.05)^2$

$$= \frac{3,267,837}{1 + 3,267,837 \times 0.05^2}$$

$$= \frac{3,267,837}{1 + 8,169.59}$$

$$\frac{3,267,837}{8170.59} = 399.951$$

$$= 400$$

Therefore, the sample size is 400.

The sampling technique used is simple random sampling in which each sensational district was assigned respondents as follows:

Enugu East 200, Enugu West 100 and Enugu North 100 based on the population strength. Therefore, the main instrument the questionnaire had to be distributed to teachers/lecturers, students, politicians, political office holders and public/civil servants.

Method of Data Analysis

Given that, the data for this paper were collected through quantitative and qualitative methods that means the use of primary sources like questionnaire, interviews as well as the secondary sources in terms of documented materials. The researcher analysed the primary data elicited from the respondents through the use frequency tables, and simple percentages. However, the study applied descriptive method to analyse qualitative data from books, journals and other secondary sources.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Given the nature of the study, the data generated were analysed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Consequently, quantitative data were presented and analysed using tables, simple percentages and complemented with content analysis of qualitative data.

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution and Return

S/N	Senatorial zone	Number of questionnaire distributed	Number of questionnaire returned	Number not returned
1	Enugu East	200	190 (47.5%)	10 (2.5%)
2	Enugu West	100	90 (22.5%)	10 (2.5%)
3	Enugu North	100	80 (20%)	20 (5%)
	Total	400	360 (90%)	40 (10%)

Source: Filed survey data 2023

From the above table, out of 400 questionnaires distributed to the three senatorial zones, 90% (360) of them were returned while 10% (40) of them were not returned. The table indicates that Enugu East has 47.5% (190) of the respondents; Enugu West has 22.5% (90) of them while Enugu North has 20% (80) of them.

Table 2: Occupational Background of the Respondents

S/N	Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
1	Teachers/Lecturers	110	30.6%
2	Students	100	27.8%
3	Politicians	40	11.1%
4	Political office holders	30	8.3%
5	Public/civil servants	80	22.2%
	Total	360	100

Source: Field survey data 2023

Table 2 indicates that 30.6% (110) of the respondents were teachers/lecturers, 27.8% (100) of them were students; 11.1% (40) of them were politicians; 8.3% (30) of them were political office holders and 22.2% (80) of them were public/civil servants. This indicates that the respondents covered the various strata of the society with informed knowledge or opinions on the subject matter.

Table 3: Has the provision of basic healthcare in Enugu State, South East Nigeria, from 2015–2023 been impacted by the local government's insufficient budgetary allocation?

S/N	Variable	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	The lack of health centers in some localities is due to inadequate funding and reliance on statutory allocation from federation account	Yes No Not sure	350 10 -	97% 3% -
			360	100

2	Primary healthcare services e.g. immunization, control of endemic and epidemic diseases, water and sanitation could have been impossible without the intervention of federal government and donor agencies.	Yes No Not sure	320 30 10	89% 8% 3%
			360	100%
3	Poor remuneration and other conditions of service of health workers account for the understaffing and ineffectiveness of the primary healthcare facilities.	Yes No Not sure	250 110 -	69% 31% -
			360	100
4	There is shortage of drugs, medicines and other essential supplies in cottage hospitals and health centres in Enugu State due to low budget and pilfering by corrupt officials.	Yes No Not sure	270 80 -10	75% 22% -3%
			360	100
5	Some of the medical facilities equipment is either outdated, inoperable or badly maintained due to local government's inadequate support of basic healthcare.	Yes No Not sure	300 60 -	83% 17% -
	Total		360	100

Source: Field survey data 2023

The table above indicates 97% (350) respondents accepted that lack of health centres in some localities is due to lack of funding and reliance on statutory allocation from the federation account, (320) or 89% of them affirmed that primary healthcare services would have been impossible without the intervention of federal government and donor agencies. 69% (250) of them agreed that poor remuneration of health workers accounts for the understaffing and ineffectiveness of primary health facilities. (270) or 75% supported the opinion that there is shortage of drugs, medicines and essential supplies in cottage hospital and health centres in Enugu State due to low budget as well as pilfering by unscrupulous officials. However, 83% (300) of the respondents held the view that paucity of funding primary healthcare by the local government is responsible for some of the equipment at health centres to be unserviceable and poorly maintained. From these responses, it is apparent that inadequate budgetary allocation by local government affected negatively primary healthcare services in Enugu State, South East Nigeria from 2015 to 2022.

Majekodunmi(2012), emphasizes that local governments in South East Nigeria have a financial crisis that prevents them from fulfilling their legal obligations. Particularly in the rural areas, they lack reliable sources of income. As a result, to fulfil their fundamental duties, they rely heavily on funding from the federation account.

Their inability to raise adequate finances on their own, along with insufficient payments from the federal and state governments is the cause of this issue. In South East Nigeria, this has had a significant impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of local administrations.

Table 4: Has governance at local level provided a platform for the training of political leaders in Enugu State, South East Nigeria from 2015 to 2023?

S/N	Variable	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Local governments provide citizens a chance to get involved in politics and act as a breeding ground for future state and federal political leaders.	Yes No Not sure	310 40 -10	86% 11% 3%
			360	100
2	Local government system imparts skills and experience needed by the local people to assume higher political leadership in other levels of governments.	Yes No Not sure	300 60 -	83% 17%
			360	100%
3	Political participation at local level exposes grassroots politicians to the practical details of party administration/organization necessary to fit into party leadership at state and federal levels.	Yes No Not sure	250 110 -	69% 31% -
			360	100
4	Local government officials when appointed or elected into other levels of government are already equipped being familiar with the operations of government at the local level.	Yes No Not sure	260 100 -	72% 28% -
			360	100
5	Local government is ineffective and inefficient tier of government and not a training ground for political leaders.	Yes No Not sure	60 300 -	17% 83% -
	Total		360	100

Source: Field survey data 2023

The table above shows 310 or 86% respondents accepted that local governments provide citizens a chance to get involved in politics and act as a breeding ground for future state and federal political leaders, 83% (300) of them accepted that local government system imparts skills and experience needed by the local people to assume higher political leadership. 69% (250) of them affirmed that political participation exposes grassroots' politicians to party administration/organization necessary to fit into party leadership at the state and federal levels. (260) or 72% supported the view that local government officials when appointed or elected into other levels of government are already equipped being familiar with the operations of government at the local level. However, 83% (300) did not support the notion that local government is ineffective and inefficient tier of government and not a training ground for political leaders. However, these responses showed that governance at local level has provided a platform for the training of political leaders in Enugu State, South East Nigeria from 2015 to 2022.

Conclusion

Local government and socio-political development are closely related. Essentially, local government is a critical pillar of socio-political development. Therefore, effective governance at the local level is imperative for promoting socio-economic development, maintenance of law and order, and promoting political participation. By providing basic services and creating an environment that is conducive to investment and growth, local government can contribute significantly to development of South East and Nigeria.

Conversely, ineffective governance at the local level creates negative consequences for socio-political development, including apathy and lack of trust in this tier of government. It is, therefore, essential for Enugu State government and the South East region of Nigeria to prioritize and invest in strengthening local government administration to ensure effective service delivery and promotion of sustainable socio-political development. To ensure this, local governments must be adequately funded to deliver services efficiently and effectively.

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