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Role of Local Governments in Agricultural Development in Nigeria: A Review

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Abstract

In Nigeria, agriculture is in the concurrent list and therefore, Local Governments by law have roles to play in agricultural development. The paper relies heavily on literature and participant observation. It highlights the roles of Local Government Councils and the extent of role accomplishment in agricultural development and suggests areas of improvement in fulfilling the mandate. Functions of a LGC in the area of agriculture include: establishment, maintenance and regulation of slaughter houses, slab, markets, gardens, parks; participation in the development of agriculture and natural resources, other than the exploitation of minerals. However, it is observed that LG in Nigeria has not performed to expectation, thereby recorded abysmal level of inefficiency and ineffectiveness. The failure of LG to perform its roles credibly is attributed among others to gross mismanagement and embezzlement of available fund, lack of financial autonomy, high level of corruption, general indiscipline among the workers, inadequacy of skilled workers, problems of participation and involvement, misplaced priority, poor job description of staff, absence of staff training and contacts with farmers. It is suggested that LGs should look inwards for improved IGR in order to make them financially self-reliant; linkages between LGC and ADP and other agricultural projects and programmes should be strengthened in order to foster development; bottom-up approach should be adopted in the linkage between LG and farmers for effective rural community involvement and participation in major decisions that affecting them; and there should be cost sharing by the three tiers of government in funding of extension at the LGA level and this could be done by legislation.

Keywords: *Agricultural development, local government.*

Introduction

The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides in part II, section 7(1) – (6) for the establishment of the Local Government (LG) system as the third tier of government in Nigeria. The section goes further to provide for powers, functions, composition and finances of the LG councils to be established thereof. Madukwe (2008) reaffirmed that LGs are established worldwide to facilitate local development – economic, social and political. In Nigeria, the Federal Constitution since 1979 has given LGs the legal, policy and institutional covers to perform these functions – third tier status; set of functions; and fiscal structure. However, they are largely responsible to the State Governments that set them up.

Local government in Nigeria according to the 1976 Guidelines is defined as a legally established representative council empowered to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the State and Federal governments in their areas. This Council is also supposed to ensure through devolution of functions, the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions such that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized (FGN, 1976). Anolue (2004) reaffirmed that the local government system in Nigeria is the established third tier of government in the country since its creation in 1976 and the law establishing it presupposes that it is the government for grassroots development. Currently there are such 774 LGs in Nigeria and according to him, about 700 of them are rural based and even among the so called urban local government system, a lot of rurality exists. This assertion points out that a larger percentage of the populace lives in the rural areas and therefore depends solely on agriculture for sustenance.

Government is said to be committed to the agricultural sector as indicated in various Policy documents. The agricultural policy emphasizes the enhancement of growth and development of all aspects of agriculture in a sustainable manner. The functions of a LGC in the area of agriculture include: establishment, maintenance and regulation of slaughter houses, slab, markets, gardens, parks; participation in the development of agriculture and natural resources, other than the exploitation of minerals. This is confirmed in LG Reform of 1976. Moreso, the New Nigerian Agricultural Policy (launched in 2001) was aimed at rationalizing the roles of the three tiers of government and the private sector in their promotional and supportive efforts to stimulate agricultural growth. It has spelt out definitive roles and responsibilities for the State and Local Governments as well as the private sector in order to remove role duplication and overlapping functions among them (FRN., 2002).

In his national address on June 18 and 25, 2003 on the need for review of the present structure of governance at LG level, President Obasanjo noted that successive governments in Nigeria have initiated several reforms on the Local Government system, with the aim of improving its effectiveness as a vehicle for promoting and sustaining grassroots development. He lamented that what we have witnessed is the abysmal failure of the LG system. It is on record according to him, that at no time in the history of the country has there been the current level of funding accruing to the LG system from the Federation Account, yet the hope for rapid and sustained development has been a mirage as successive councils have grossly under-performed in almost all the areas of their mandate.

The purpose of the review is to highlight the role of LGC in agricultural development and suggest areas of improvement in fulfilling the mandate. The paper relied on literature and participant observation.

The Concept and History of Local Government in Nigeria

The concept of Local Government involves a philosophical commitment to democratic participation in the governing process at the grassroots level. This implies legal and administrative decentralization of authority, power and personnel by a higher level of government to a community with a will of its own, performing specific functions as within the wider national framework. A Local Government is a government at the

grassroots level of administration meant for meeting peculiar grassroots need of the people (Arowolo, 2008). The definitions of LG by the 1976 Guidelines according to Igbuzor (2007) bring out four key characteristics of Local Government. First, LG officials are elected. Regular elections at specified period or time are a feature of Local Government. Second, the LG unit must have a legal personality distinct from the State and Federal Governments. Thirdly, the Local Government must have specified powers to perform a range of functions, and finally, it must enjoy substantial autonomy. The Local Government autonomy means that the Local Government is elected at the local level and operates independently of the State and Federal Governments. The characteristics of LG autonomy include among other things ability to make its own laws, rules and regulations formulate, execute and evaluate its own plans and the right to recruit, promote, develop and discipline its own staff.

The 1976 reform introduced a multi-purpose single-tier Local Government system. They were designed to make the Local Governments a functional and autonomy third tier of government with a locative functions for the extension of social services and the development of rural infrastructure and amenities at the community level. In 1991, a major landmark reform was introduced as the system had legislative arm. In addition, the Babangida administration increased the number of Local Government from 301 in 1976 to 453 in 1989 and 589 in 1991. Also, the Abacha administration increased the number to 774 Local Councils that we have today and the administrative structure also underwent some changes (Igbuzor, 2007).

LGC and Agricultural and Rural Development

The most fundamental rationale for creating LG anywhere in the world is to employ it to take responsibility for the development of the area directly and also contribute indirectly to the development of the nation. Development is a process of gradual change and planned inducement for progressive improvement. It involves both physical change and improved competence of people. It also entails improvement in the socio-economic and technological systems that operate in a given country. Rural development in Nigeria had been tied to agricultural development programmes and is supported by extension services and an attempt to improve agricultural output has always been seen as a facet of rural development. It is thus difficult to segregate rural development from agricultural productivity improvement and modernization efforts under Nigeria's approach (Agbamu, 2006).

Rural development according to Ijere (1990) is defined, as the process of increasing the per capita income and the quality of life of the rural dwellers to enable them become prime movers of their own destiny. Igbokwe and Ajala (1995) defined rural development as a multi-dimensional process by which the productivity, income and welfare, in terms of health, nutrition, education and other features of satisfactory life of rural people can be improved or transformed. Agricultural development according to Okoye (2009) is the process of harnessing agriculture's potentials for food security, economic growth, sustainable livelihoods, employment creation and capital formation. He further stated that agricultural development will only take place if and when the constraint to sectoral growth is removed. Areas requiring priority intervention according to him include: improving research, extension and farmer linkages; development of marketing infrastructure; targeting commercial agricultural production; improving access

and availability of credit in rural areas; promoting development of agro-based rural enterprises.

The LGCs are responsible for agricultural and rural development in their areas of jurisdiction as stipulated in the 1999 Constitution and the 1976 Guidelines of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This is why most projects and programmes implementation are mainstreamed within LGC structure, with trainings and other technical assistance provided to strengthen them. However, there are six standardized departments in a LGC in which agricultural department is one, each with a Supervisor and Head of Department who is a career civil servant. The responsibilities of the agricultural department are overall agricultural development, including crops, livestock, fisheries and agro-forestry/forestry plantation development (IDB, 2007).

Local Government Funding in Nigeria and Agricultural Development

The Local Governments according to Ekong (2003) are expected to derive their finances from property rating, capitation, flat rate and other forms of taxes within their territories. Apart from internally generated taxes, the LGs are also entitled to some proportion of the Federal budget which was fixed at 10 percent as of 1981. This is to say that statutory allocation from the Federal and State Governments however form the main support of the LGs.

The Revenue Act of 1981 according to Olukotun (1998) was enacted to give teeth to section 149 of the 1979 Constitution and to give expression to the revenue allocation. The Act recognized and included Local Governments among the tiers of government in Nigeria that would benefit from statutory allocations from the federation account. The following formula was adopted: 10 percent of the Federation Account; 10 percent share of the total revenue of the state; internally generated revenue from taxes, rents, fees, etc. The above formula has been modified by successive governments and the current percentage share of the federation account for LG is 15 percent. Igbuzor (2007) noted that during Babangida regime (1984 – 1992) there were certain reforms aimed at ensuring LG autonomy and this among others included direct allocation to LG without passing through state government. The regime also increased LG statutory allocation from 15 percent to 20 percent with effect from 1992.

For LG to serve as a powerful instrument for rapid community and rural development according to Okafor (2010), it must possess a solid and sound financial base. To ensure that LG performs the numerous functions assigned to it, the 1999 constitution makes provision for statutory funding of LG. To give effect to the above, 20% of the amount standing in the federation account is paid to them on a monthly basis, while 10% of each State's IGR is also paid to the LGCs. The bulk of the revenues of most LGCs in Nigeria comes from the Federal Government. In some cases, especially in rural LGs, the grant constitutes as much as 80% of the revenue. According to Amakom (2009), over 59% of financing in Igbo-Etiti LGA, Enugu State (about 266 million naira in 2004 and 434 million naira in 2005) comes from its Federation account allocation. The fund however goes into a joint account controlled by the State Government. Other major sources include funds from value added tax (VAT) and grants, but also from occasional state allocations, although these amounts are usually small. The LGA also receives direct project funds from external support agencies via the State Governments or directly from NGOs as in the case with Water

Aid. Koyenikan (2008) notes that the revised policy agrees with the first but emphasized roles and responsibilities of the three tiers of government in jointly financing agricultural extension. Cost sharing by the three tiers of government, support from development partners, the private sector, NGOs and farmers organizations could be fixed as obtains in donor supported programmes. The agricultural development fund should be effectively sourced and used as sustained fund as stated in Nigeria's agricultural policy.

Linkages between LGC and farmers

In order to transform the rural areas LGC according to (Anikpo,2008) is not only expected to play a very important role in agricultural development, through support for agro-allied industries and farming extension services, but also in the grassroots mobilization of the rural populace for the desired transformation of the rural areas. He further noted that grassroots development represents the attempt to address the institutional and structural imbalance between urban and rural areas by mobilizing and motivating the large majority of rural dwellers through the traditional association and distribution in an effort to achieve national economy, self-sufficiency and socio political stability.

Koyenikan (2008) opined that decentralization of extension to lower tiers of government as stated in Nigeria's Agricultural Policy is necessary for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of extension programmes at the local level. According to him, if LGs take responsibility for extension as the closest to the grassroots, farmers' needs could be better met because the staff will be localized, conversant with the needs and would be able to facilitate extension activities more effectively. Every activity should reflect local needs e.g. training and mass media messages, and materials should be locally produced. Local action plans should be developed at the community level and passed upwards (bottom-up) as obtained in Fadama II and others. There is the need to learn from the farmers' informal research, indigenous knowledge technologies (IKTs).

Arowolo (2008) noted that for the past decades, more euphemistic phrases have been employed to justify people's participation at the grassroots. They include: "development from below", "bottom-up approach to development", popular participation", "bringing government closer to the people" and other catch phrases to argue for people's involvement in the affairs that directly affect them. From all indications and convictions, research and physical observations have shown that there has been more hue and cry than action. LG prepares estimates for its revenue and expenditure without proper recourse to, and due consultation with the people for whom the exercise is being carried out to know their needs, their problems and potentials.

Linkages between Local Government Councils and ADPs

Madukwe, Okoli and Eze (2002) recalled that with state creation in 1968, the main focus of agro-technology transfer policy was food production through the Federal and States' Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) and it was slow in achieving the desired objectives because of the bureaucracy. However, Mijindadi (1983) re-affirmed that MOA was the sole agency responsible for agro-technology transfer until the 1976 Local Government reform, which gave some specific agricultural technology transfer functions

to LGCs. Further reforms of the Nigerian agricultural technology transfer policy gave rise, in the seventies, to the involvement of Universities and Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) to transfer agro-technology to farmers (Madukwe, Okoli and Eze, 2002)

Nor and Madukwe (2002) observed that Local Government Authorities (LGAs) are not currently engaged in agricultural research even at the adaptative level, and are not linked to any research institute, hence, they may obtain information from ADPs or MOA through agriculture department of the LGAs. They further noted that there are both administrative and direct service linkages which ADPs and LGAs may choose while seeking for co-ordination. According to them, joint use of staff is a linkage that can be established by ADPs and LGA. Also the management of the two organizations might choose to jointly fund monthly technology reviews meetings (MTRMs) or workshops for EAs and staff or to budget jointly, or purchase services from other organizations.

Linkages between LGCs and NPFS

The overall goals of the National Programme for Food Security (NPFS) is to improve national and household food security and to reduce rural poverty in an economically sustainable basis through improved household security and incomes; enhanced food security of consumers; enhanced farmers and consumers access to support services such as extension, credit, nutrition and health education; and fostered participation of the poorer section of the rural population in the development of the community (IDB, 2007). According to IDB (2007), project implementation will be mainstreamed within LGC structure, with training and other technical assistance provided to strengthen them. The departments covering agricultural technical services work and social services are relevant for the execution of the projects and they will be strengthened and refocused for delivery of services to the communities. They will second staff for programme execution, and the LGC implementation committee will be responsible for planning, collation of the participating communities, annual work plan and Budget (AWPB), progress reporting, monitoring and evaluation in close collaboration with the ADPs. In order to further foster the decentralization process according to IDB (2007), each participating LGC will appoint a LGC food security co-ordinator. He/she will be responsible in time with the state food security co-ordinator. Each LGC would allocate selected staff for site development (2) and outreach (3), ensure the necessary synergies between LGC departments and take front-line responsibility for project implementation. Funding of LGC activities will be based on the approved state programme budgets and channeled through the ADPs.

Linkage between LGCs and Fadama III project

The NFDP3 covers thirty-six States including the Federal Capital Territory. The World Bank is funding US\$250 million with counterpart funding to the tune of US\$200 million from the borrower and the participating communities. Indicative project costs approximate US\$450.0 million. Out of this total cost, the breakdown of the counterpart funding is as follows: IDA-US\$ 250 million; FGN-US\$23 million; SGs-US\$ 77 million; LGAs US\$ 40 million; and communities- US\$60 million (Oredipe, 2008). He noted under institutional arrangement at Local Government, the establishment of Local Fadama Development Committee (LFDC) and Local Fadama Desk (LFD) in the participating states by the project. According to him, the LFDC and its secretariat and

LFD will be responsible for local level review and approval of the Local Development Plans (LDPs) and associated subprojects. Also, the LFD will comprise one or two civil servants seconded to the project to play the role of clearing house for LDPs. However, Local Fadama Desk Office (LFDO) roles and responsibilities; and LFDC composition and responsibilities abound. The implementation arrangements indicate that a lot of linkages exist between LGCs and Fadama III projects. These may include joint use of staff, staff transfers; joint funding of project, etc.

Problems affecting Role Performance of Local Governments in Nigeria

Mkparu (2008) notes that a number of factors have been identified as the reasons for the inability of the LGCs to have lived up to expectations in spite of the deep pool of resources (human and material) “supposedly” available to most of them. These include: (i) the current contracting out of the revenue windows of LGCs by the State Governments; (ii) the issue of poor staffing; (iii) general poor attitude to work of staff, (iv) the issue of constituting of the Council with people who are alienated from the culture of the people such as elected and appointed officials; and (iv) lack of transparency and accountability which induce high incidence of corruption and corrupt practices. Gumel (2009), Igbuzor(2007) and Arowolo(2008) observe that the factors that inhibit the performance of the LGCs are multifaceted. The most important factors are those that hinge on: (i) operational factors arising directly from the behaviour and attitude of the persons operating the system i.e. politicization distribution of amenities in the LGCs; (ii) excessive State Government control of and interference in the activities of the LGCs; (iii) the phenomenon of bribery, corruption and inefficiency on the part of some LG officials; (iv) staffing problems ; (v) electoral irregularities seldom allows for credible candidates to be elected at the LGCs elections; and (vi) inadequate funding. Some defects of the LGC technology transfer policy according to Madukwe (2000) include poor job description of staff, lack of mobility and absence of staff training and contacts with farmers.

Conclusion

Agricultural policy emphasizes the enhancement of growth and development of all aspects of agriculture in a sustainable manner, in order to stimulate increased investment in rural areas. The LGC is however empowered and assigned to develop the local areas agriculturally as contained in the laws establishing it. However, LG in Nigeria has not performed to expectation, thereby recorded abysmal level of inefficiency and ineffectiveness vis-à-vis justification for its establishment.

Recommendation

The following recommendations are made: 1. LG share of federal allocation and each state IGR should be paid to them directly without going into joint accounts controlled by the state government. Also, LGs should look inwards for improved IGR in order to make them financially self-reliant; 2. Linkages between LGC and ADP and other agricultural projects and programmes should be strengthened in order to foster development; 3. Bottom-up approach should be adopted in the linkage between LG and farmers for effective rural community involvement and participation in major decisions that affecting

them; 4. There should be cost sharing by the three tiers of government in funding of extension at the LGA level and this could be done by legislation.

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