

Strategic Planning in Local Government Administration in Nigeria

Adedayo O. Olaleye and L. Andy Afinotan*

Department of Political Science,
Joseph Ayo Babalola University
Ikeji-Arakeji, Osun State

*Corresponding author's email: andyafinotan {at} yahoo.com

ABSTRACT--- *All organizations, the family, the church, business enterprise and government undertaking require planning; failure to plan is planning to fail. Planning is that function of management in which a conscious choice of patterns of influence is determined for decision makers so that the many decisions will be coordinated for some period of time and will be directed towards the chosen broad goals. This paper therefore examines the structure of the local governments, the resources available (human, material and financial), the environment as well as the capacity to meet the needs of its constituents. Materials for the study are sourced through the internet, the literature and personal interview with stakeholders. It is descriptive and analytic. It recommends a total review of the aspects of the Nigerian Constitution appertaining to the structure of the federal system in place, particularly fiscal federalism, intergovernmental relations and allocation of powers and responsibilities.*

Keywords--- Strategy; Planning; Strategic planning; Local Government and Administration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Planning is the process by which a manager looks to the future and discovers alternative courses of action. The need for planning becomes more obvious as persons and organizations develop an awareness of the precise nature of their objectives (Massie 1979). Therefore, the first stage of any type of planning is the conscious and explicit statement of the ultimate objectives. Planning at all levels of an organization is desirable. Planning is that function of management in which a conscious choice of patterns of influence is determined for decision makers so that the many decisions will be coordinated for some period of time and will be directed towards the chosen broad goals.

Planning does not only involve predetermining a course of action to be taken, relative to a known event, but includes mentally searching for possibilities of future problems that may appear. Techniques of handling uncertainties are extremely valuable. If the probability of occurrence of several events is great enough then alternative plans may be developed. The economics of alternative uses of the managers' time governs the extent to which alternative plans are desirable so that the needs for planning results from various changes in the environment are undertaken. The aspects of this changing environment are;

- i. Changes in government policy
- ii. Changes in technology
- iii. Changes in overall economic activity, including prices, employment of labour, raw materials etc.
- iv. Changes in the nature of competition
- v. Changes in social norms and attitudes.

A new dimension to the planning process is strategic planning. Strategic planning becomes essential today more than ever before as government undertakings are no more required to only "satisfice" (Herbert Simon 1976) but are expected if they cannot maximize should attempt to break-even. In fact the majority of people who live in the rural areas expect more from the Local government than from the other tiers of government.

2. STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategy Defined

Many definitions have been offered on this concept. There is no absolute consensus on what the term means since every definition contains implications on how strategy should be created (and so subject to methodological preference). **Strategy is a rule for making decisions and condition of partial ignorance, whereas policy is a contingent decision**

(Ansoff 1968). Porter (1980) sees strategy *as a broad formula for how business is going to compete, what its goals should be, and what policies will be needed to carry out those goals*. The essence of formulating competitive strategy is relating an organization (a company/local government) to its environment. Strategy is the pattern or plan that integrates an organization's major goal, policies and action sequences into a cohesive whole.

A well formulated strategy helps to marshal and allocates an organization's resources into a unique and viable posture based on its internal competences and shortcomings, anticipated changes in the environment, and contingent moves by intelligent opponents. Strategic decisions are those that determine the overall direction of an enterprise and its ultimate viability in light of the predictable and unpredictable and the unknowable changes that may occur in its most important surrounding environment (Quinn, 1980).

Strategic decisions are concerned with:

- The scope of an organization's activities
- The matching of an organization's activities
- The matching of an organization's activities to its resources capability
- The allocation and reallocation of major resources in an organization.
- The values, expectations and goals of those influencing strategy.
- The direction in which an organization will move in the long term.
- Implications for change throughout the organization (Johnson and Scholes, 1993).

Strategy is the pattern of resource allocation decisions made throughout an organization. These encapsulate both desired goals and beliefs about what are acceptable and, most critically unacceptable means for achieving them (Robson, 1997).

Components of the Strategic Plan

There are four major components of the strategic plan. These are:

Mission: This component addresses the organization's basic question of *'What business are we in?'* This single essential, sentence should include no quantification but must unambiguously state the purpose of the organization and should, just as carefully define what the organization does not do. This mission represents the view that senior managers have for the future of the organization, so it is what they want it to become or achieve. This view- hence *one alternative name for mission is vision*- is the central purpose for the existence, of the organization. The mission gives a way to judge the appropriateness of all potential activities that the organization might engage in. Rader (1994) offer seven characteristics of powerful mission statements as follows:

- Engage the imagination with powerful images of target outcomes
- Employ images that are clear, concise and compelling
- Express strong values and beliefs about the future
- Provide guidance for actions that must and must not be done
- Focus discussions and shape choices about consequences
- Challenge us to stretch continually beyond current performance
- Apply to each and every member of the community- 'I see what it means to me'

Goals: Goals define the desired future positions of the organization. They are selected on the basis of the defined mission. Some models of the strategic planning process separate goals from objectives. In that case goals are broad and timeless statements of the end results that the organization considers will achieve the mission. Objectives would then 'flesh out' these goals with quantitative as well as qualitative terms since they are specific and tangible measures of the goals to achieve the mission. In other instances organizations use the terms goal, objective and aim interchangeably.

Strategy: Strategy defines the general direction in which the organization chooses to move to meet goals to achieve the mission. This strategy will include statements of the acceptable *how* to move towards the desired *what*. The strategy is therefore constrained by the nature of the organization, including its resources, capabilities, culture, structure, etc. and by the environment within which it operates. The strategy constructs a framework which hopes to ensure that the organization makes the best use of what it has to work with and adequately compensates for its limitations.

Just as the mission defined what the organization did not do, so the strategy also defines how it will not achieve its aims. The rejected approaches, whether they were consciously rejected or not, allow all management decisions to be tested against the strategy as a measure of 'acceptability'. Therefore the plan that documents this component should clearly state those assumptions that formed the underlying structure to the formulation process. It could consider the threats and

opportunities that were judged to be appropriate to the acknowledged strength and weaknesses. In the light of these, the strategic plan should document which of the opportunities are deemed to be most beneficial to pursue.

Policy: The strategy exists as a collective umbrella for the policy component. This element should give a broad assessment of the organization structure, business system and resources inherent in the selected strategies. The policies provide a framework for the implementation of any major changes needed to be made. The policies should provide the key measurement and the key ratios that summarize the expected benefits which the strategy intends to yield so that, in due course, the success, or otherwise, of it can be judged. The policies, since they structure the actual management of project, are a form of delegation that hopes to allow autonomy and yet still maintain a consistency of direction.

3. STRATEGIC PLANNING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION

In visualizing a workable and viable strategic plan for Nigeria's local government system, recourse must be made into evaluating its origin and evolution, the current structure, functions, as well as the resources available (human, material and financial). This we attempt to do subsequently.

Local Government in the Colonial Era and the First Republic

Historically, local government administration can be traced to the imposition of formal colonial rule in January 1, 1900. Consequently, the Native Authority System of local government was created by the British colonial powers. This is what is popularly called “**indirect rule**” (what Dudley, 1973 termed “**praetorian rule**”). It was cheaper for the colonial authority to recourse to the indirect rule system as the existing native administrative system was highly dynamic and suited the purposes of the British colonial Lords. Overtime, the Native authority system was transformed within the political economy of primitive accumulation of the colonial capitalist social formation.

The peasants were thereby divorced from their means of production while their surplus value from the peasant production of cash crops was appropriated by the metropolitan British Empire from 1939. The traditional native administration was gradually converted into a classical colonial system of local government so as to firmly establish British rule and hegemony. Hence, the first local government reform of 1954 was to further integrate Nigeria into the global phenomenon of rising imperialism. The native authority administration thus became an instrument of class and feudal domination. To Agagu (2007), right from inception, the structure of local government in Nigeria was basically designed to serve colonial interest and facilitate the exploitation of the Nigerian people and resources.

Gboyega (1987) cited in Agagu posits that there are four epochs in the evolution of local government in Nigeria each of these possesses its distinctive character and philosophical beliefs. The beliefs justify and determine the institutional arrangements upon which the local governments were established. The first epoch covers mainly the period 1950 to 1966; while the second epoch was the period of the military administration. The 1976 Local Government Reforms marked a watershed and the fourth epoch was the presidential era.

Local government administration followed the pattern charted out by the colonial governments in the various regions of the country. Each region of the federation pursued that type of local government administration it thought suited it most. The East got enmeshed in a three tier local government structure each having independent operation with attendant challenges. The three tiers were the county, district and local councils. The West adopted a modified system of the East combined with the British model resulting in a multi-tier system made up of divisional, urban or rural district and local councils. The North pursued a Native Authority system that was not quite distinguishable from the Native Authority system hitherto being practiced. The Native Authority system was defined as :

- (a) Any chief or other person associated with a council either as
 - (i) a chief or other person in council;
 - (ii) a chief or other person and council
- (b) any council;
- (c) Any group of person
- (d) Any chief or other person.

This was the situation when the military struck in 1966. When the military struck in 1966, it first tampered with the system by abolishing the native authority and replaced it with local government authorities (LGA). Under the new governance of military rule, the native authority Alkali courts were converted into area courts under the jurisdiction of the state judicial system.

The 1976 Reforms as a watershed

The Guidelines for Local Government Reforms separates the functions, which should be deployed to Local Governments from those of the state and the federal Governments (Guidelines cited in Aborisade: 1985:1963).

The functions of the Local Government were divided into two broad categories

- (i) Mandatory/exclusive functions and
- (ii) The permissive function which they were expected to perform concurrently with the State Government (Orewa, op. cit)
- (i) **The Mandatory Functions:** Responsibility for markets, motor parts, environmental sanitation, slaughter houses and slabs, public conveniences and burial ground; licensing and regulation of bank houses, sale of liquor, bicycles, hand carts, hoarding, drumming, etc; and the collection of property rates., community tax, forestry trees, and parking charges.
- (ii) **The Concurrent or Permissive Functions:** Responsibility for health institutions other than hospitals, nursery, primary and adult education, libraries, reading rooms, rural and semi-urban supply, non-truck roads, public sewage system, agricultural, veterinary and health extension service, public housing and fire services.

4. CURRENT EVENTS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

There is an ongoing constitutional review by the National Assembly and many observations can be deduced from their proceedings. It is important to note that the Senate is not planning to remove the supervisory powers of the States over the local governments. What it plans to do is to allow local governments to have access to their funds from the Federation Account. How they utilize the funds can then be supervised by state governors. It is believed this will bring development closer to the grassroots, which is the reason that accounts for why nations have local governments in the first place.

If one recalls the whole idea of Joint State-Local government Account was originally planned in a way to make states to contribute 10% of its revenue to the account and then redistribute to the local governments in the state in order to achieve even development. In practice however, states do not contribute the said 10% but instead, confiscate the funds that come to the local government from the federation account and apply them to the uses they decide at the detriment of the rural poor and grassroots, development.

Critics fear that if this proposal sales through, it would only imply that local governments have more money at their disposal to embezzle. This would then increase political competition (including electoral violence) at the local government and therefore would not improve grassroots development. Agreed also, the problem with Nigeria's politics may be more of the character of the Nigerian politician than political structures, but the nation need to put in place the right laws first and foremost, while equally fighting to get the right people in place.

Moreover, the contemplation of the constitution is that money be made available for development at the grassroots level with the states retaining supervisory powers in order to prevent embezzlement as many fear. The fact remains that where governance is mostly needed is at the rural level. For that is where 70% of Nigerians live as well as the informal sector feeding the nation.

The nation need rural roads, markets, schools, parks and more, and such are the functions of local governments. Developed as they are, local governments are still an essential feature in most advanced economies. In Nigeria, like in all other developing countries, the need for local governments is even more urgent and that is why the recommendation of the Senate committee on Constitution Review to give local governments back their money is perhaps the most important of all their recommendations. Let it be.

5. CHALLENGES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION

There is no gainsaying that local government administration in Nigeria is faced with numerous challenges. Local government areas are supposed to be the engines of national development. Despite the constitutionally guaranteed roles of the local governments, the various state governments have been treating the local governments as if they were departments under their administrative systems. In most cases, funds meant for local governments from the federation accounts are deducted by the state governments under the guise of spurious '**joint**' development projects. Section J. of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria guarantees the existence of the local government system by democratically elected councils. The constitution empowers the local government to participate in economic planning and development of the local government area. It further prescribes the establishment of a joint economic planning board by a law to be enacted by the state House of Assembly. The constitution further stipulates that the functions conferred by law upon local governments shall include those set out in part, of the fourth schedule to the constitution.

Sometimes, local government chairmen are given handouts on how to run their administration. All these happen with the tacit connivance of the federal government. Some state governors (as happened in Imo, Ondo and Ekiti states,) even go the whole hog in removing the local government chairmen and councilors before the expiration of their term. Though, the courts upturned the unconstitutional acts of some governors by ordering the restoration of the deposed chairmen and councilors to their posts. However it took the governments some time to obey and implement the court orders. These cases are just a few of much unconstitutional interference by elected officials in the affairs of local government administration. This has prevented the local government system from fulfilling the transformative purposes of its creation. Nay, the inability of the local government to fulfill its mandate can be located in the class division and contradiction within the capitalist state system. That is why all previous local government reforms were nothing but cosmetic antics.

The performance of the Local Government as an institution of government has been at the lowest ebb 20 years prior the early 1970s. There were strains of financing primary education particularly in Northern Nigeria. Most of the Local government could hardly manage to balance their recurrent budgets even in 1972/73 (Orewa: 1991:2008). The situation was such that only the Local Government Authorities in two of the six Northern States were able to prepare development plans which had been established 20 years (1948-68) and could not draw up such plans mainly for lack of finance (Orewa).

Another problem that beset the Local Government includes lack of forward-looking staff structure with conditions of service comparable to the civil services. As such most trained officers transferred their services to the states and the federal civil services thus depleting the Local Government manpower. The aforementioned situation propelled the inclusion of a section in the terms of references of the Public Service Review commission to deal appropriately with the problems.

In spite of the seemingly noble objectives of the 1976 local government reforms the Nigerian state and local government have become avenues of primitive accumulation of property and wealth. Even more worrisome is the overriding of the autonomy of local governments by the various state governments. Though many of the policy makers mounted slogans of 'participatory democratization' and of 'bringing government closer to the people' advanced as *raison d'être* of local government reforms, there is actually nothing to show for it. These problems include poverty, illiteracy and lack of access to safe drinking water, infant mortality, low purchasing power and preventable diseases. In 2006 for instance the national poverty line stood at 43% with over 70.2% of the population in Nigeria earning less than a \$1 a day. People at the local government levels are worse hit.

Furthermore, the local government areas do not have the freedom to freely operate in the service of the people. This is why Nigeria fared badly on the UNICEF social indicator with 70.2% of the population in Nigeria earning less than \$1 a day. In fact the peculiar nature of the present arrangement is antithetic to the provision of goods and services to the people because policy formulation is determined by class interest. The scenario just presented provides the *raison-d'être* for strategic planning at the local government level.

6. LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The Nigerian state therefore created local governments as the third tier of government with the objective of ensuring effective, measurable and efficient service delivery to the people. Local government administration is widely regarded as the closest to the people of the grassroots. It performs vital functions such as: political education, mobilization of the people for popular participation in governance, vehicle for political accountability, among others.

None of the functions of the local government are working in Nigeria as an independent country for those born before 1960, you will agree with me that these functions were working during the colonial era. From these functions, it can be seen that Local Governments are designed for the rural poor and has been embraced by almost all countries of the world. As a global necessity, local government administration is such that virtually every country of the world has one form of it or the other. In Africa countries such as Egypt, Kenya, Mali and South Africa have well established local government systems. In Asia, Afghanistan, India, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Palestinian Authority, Philippines, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Turkey also do have (Mefor, 2013).

In Europe, Albania, Andorra, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Isle of Man, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom, (England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland) all have well established local government systems. In North America, Canada, and Mexico are good examples as well as the United States. In Oceania, Australia and New Zealand have excellent local government administrations and in South America, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay all have thriving local government systems.

Local government or municipal government is a form of public administration, which in a majority of contexts, exists as the lowest tier of administration within a given country and that is how it is conceived in the 1999 constitution for Nigeria. In all federal states, local government generally comprises the third (or sometimes fourth) tier of government but the current practice in Nigeria has rendered the local government structure meaningless by removing its autonomy. This is not so in other countries; though they may not be independent, they are financially autonomous in all the countries that have them.

In India the local government is the third level of government apart from the state and central governments. Local government is the lowest level in the system of government in Malaysia- after federal and state. Local government is the third tier of government in Pakistan, after federal Government and provincial government. There are also three levels of local government in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. There are two levels of local government in the Netherlands, the provinces and the municipalities. The system of local government is different in each of the four countries of the United Kingdom. In total there are 426 local authorities in the UK. 346 of these are in England, 26 in Northern Ireland, 32 in Scotland and 22 are in Wales.

Canada has a federal system with three orders of government. The largest is the federal government, followed by the provincial and local governments. Mexico is a federal Republic made up by 31 states and a federal district and Local Governments as well as Brazil, which is divided into 26 states and a federal district and municipalities at the same time.

7. STAFFING THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The introduction of the unified Local Government service Board was a major achievement of the 1976 Reform. Two alternative proposals were made in this respect to have a weak Local Government service Board or a strong one. The weak alternative arrangement is for the board to advertise and process applications for the vacant posts and to forward them to the local government concerned for appointment or promotion. However, all the 19 states then opted for the strong Local Government Service board, each of which has full responsibility for appointment, promotion, posting and discipline (excluding dismissal) of the junior staff (Grade levels 04 or 05 and above) to either a committee of officials headed by the secretary to the local government or the secretary to the local government acting on the advice of a committee of officials (Orewa, 2000).

8. SUMMARY

This discourse examines the dwindling fortunes of the local government administration in Nigeria and attempts to chart strategic approaches to ameliorate the situation. From the colonial regime through the first republic and until the military era it could be argued that the local government administration was undergoing experimentation. Such experimentation without a harmonized structure puts paid to any envisioned focus or mission for the administration hence the low level of performance. The 1976 Reforms attempted to salvage the situation by setting up a unified local government administration; the attendant challenges such as corruption and impunity rubbed the system of the possible gains that ought to have been made. Having, diagnosed the ailments of the local government administration we have suggested a reorientation of the vision and mission of the system; requested for a total overhauling of enabling laws to factor in the basic needs of the system which when they are met would assure greater performance in the future.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to undertake a turn-around of Nigeria's local government administration, an exhaustive overhauling of the system must be undertaken.

Firstly, there must be a total review of the functions of the three tiers of government to streamline them in relation to the resources being made available to each tier. Such a review would involve the assessment of the capabilities of each tier to perform the services allotted to it. The functions of local government that is grassroots-based, such as primary education, primary health care, and agricultural production should be emphasized and allocated appropriately and backed with required financial commitment to ensure performance.

Secondly, tax powers among the various tiers must be assigned equitably so as to give the local government the ability to meet the requirements of its allotted functions. For instance, property tax and ratings should be assigned to the local government in terms of fixing the rates and their collection. Other areas worth being considered are the personal income tax (PAYE) as well as direct assessment. Local government should not only be empowered to collect taxes within their jurisdiction, they should be permitted to retain the total proceeds.

Thirdly, the revenue allocation formula should be reviewed to favour the local government because of its closeness to the grassroots and whose activities not only touch but have direct bearing on the larger number of citizens. The local

governments should enjoy at least 35% of the Federation Account so as to meet the need to relief the poor and enhance grassroots development.

Fourthly, the situation whereby local government funds are misapplied through spurious joint development projects by many state governments should be discontinued. Fiscal independence should be granted the local governments. State control of local government funds should be checked and all funds accruing to the local government must be transferred to it directly; i.e. Section 162(5) of the constitution should be reviewed and amended.

Finally, local government must be made to demonstrate fiscal discipline both in revenue generation and spending. Measures must be put in place to ensure accountability transparency and discipline in their operations.

For Nigeria to have a sustainable local government system there is need for genuine involvement of the people and decentralization of power from state to local authorities. To do this, we may have to tinker with certain constitutional provisions. There is also a need to entrench authentic rule of law and independent judiciary. Cases of electoral manipulation must be condemned by all peace loving people. Nigeria also needs to explore alternative source of revenue for local government administration. This is the path to genuine autonomy of local government system in Nigeria.

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