

Development Centers and Grassroots Good Governance in Oji River Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria (2019-2023)

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ABSTRACT

Governance at the grassroots level is ideally supposed to serve as a mirror through which the performance of every other government is measured. This informs the establishment of development centers in the Oji River Local Government Area. Notwithstanding the existence of development centers vis-à-vis their intended benefits to the local populace, what is on the ground is at variance with its purpose as the development centers cannot mobilize the grassroots populace to participate in governance and administer infrastructural development at that level. Data for this study was obtained through secondary sources with content analysis of information from the internet, journals, and books. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Need Theory (1943) as a framework for the study. The paper recommended that the establishment of development centers is in order but appropriate holistic measures should be put in place to enable it to serve its purpose which is based on encouraging good governance at the grassroots levels in Oji River local government Area of Enugu State, among other areas. The study, therefore, concluded that the current state of development centers in Oji River local government area is an aberration to any ideal democratic governance where the grassroots is supposed to be the pillar that holds firm other wider tiers of government.

Keywords: Development Centers, Grassroots Governance, Oji River L.G.A, Enugu State

INTRODUCTION

In every ideal democratic setting, governance at the grassroots level is always advocated and encouraged to thrive. The reasons behind these are not farfetched, because good governance should center on the overall activities of human being and their welfare. People are the epicenter of good governance and it would be abnormal to claim that good governance exists at the grassroots level where the residents appear to be at a loss with government policies and programs, cannot participate in any activities of government, witness government projects or programs going on within their vicinity and experience the applications of rule of law among others.

Local government administration in Nigeria, no doubt being the third tier of government, has been challenged to non performing status irrespective divergent reforms. These challenges were adduced to spring out of lack of suitable administrative management and leadership control which is key to the system's effective and responsible grass-root development (Musa and Amino 2020)

Good governance at the grassroots level is not a one-man show as several stakeholders have to be directly or indirectly involved to ensure the manifestations of the desires of the people at that level, which also serves as the dividend of democracy. Civil society organization while playing its role as the third sector of society encourages activities to boost economic growth and attracts social and civic infrastructure critical for the basic

needs of the people (Ghaus-Pasha. 2004)

Public, private, and civil society organizations play a collaborative role to ensure good governance at the grassroots level, development centers in Oji River local government should play a lead role by coordinating community-based organizations like town unions, youth organizations, women's organizations, traditional autonomous communities council of chiefs, security organizations like neighborhood watch and forest guard established by the government, private sector and other nongovernmental organizations (NGO) among others but in reality, the situation is not the same.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Development Centers in Oji River Local Government Area of Enugu State Nigeria.

Nigeria being a federal state where governmental powers are shared between the Federal Government, 36 State Governments and 774 Local Government Areas as enshrined in first and second schedule of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended 2011 designed local government to function effectively at the grass root level. The profound failure of local government at the grassroots level, pave way for search for alternative since good governance at that level is a catalyst for national development. Mathew and Abdul (2022) pointed it clear they asserted that frequently overlooked, Nigeria's local governments are disproportionately important; if they functioned well, they would be best positioned to meet people's basic needs and to build their resilience to cope with everyday challenges. In reality, however, "no local government in Nigeria works for the people.

Development center is a creation of law of various states in Nigeria as an indirect 4th level of government in their states which is meant to administer good governance at the grassroots level.

Onwe. Ibeogu and Nwogboga (2015) pointed out that the needs to set up local government and development centers (development areas) as well as the purpose they serve are identical. Okoli (2002 as cited in Onwe. Ibeogu and Nwogboga, 2015) summarized the purpose for establishing local government system to include;

1. To fill the gap in remote areas which the national government is unable to fill and to
2. Complement and extend the national government closer to the people.

In Enugu State, the government of Dr. Chimaroke Nnamani in 2003 established 56 development centers to function at the grassroots level which will be in a better position to reach out to the grassroots dwellers and harness their strength to increase government presence, bridge the developmental gap which continues to expand as society keeps evolving (Sammie E.A 2018). The rural populace embraced this development with high hopes and looked forward to opportunities such innovation would create; especially to participate in government they could call their own. They were given executive powers and made to function like local governments with the statutory allocations meant for the mother local government shared amongst them equally. The executive heads were addressed as local government chairmen. They were not equally established in numbers as some local governments like Oji River were three in numbers while others like Ezeagu, Udi, Nsukka LGA's, etc were 4 development centers in numbers. The government of Barr. Sullivan Iheanacho Chime changed the structures of the development centers by reversing to recognizing only seventeen (17) local government areas as local government with executive power and placing development centers as subordinate with the title of the appointees as administrators.

The action created confusion over the duties and responsibilities of development centers. The complaint raised at some quarters over unequal numbers of the established development centers was not attended to until the government of Rt Hon Ifeanyi Lawrence Ugwuanyi came on board in 2015, creating an additional twelve (12) development centers in 2018 thereby giving every local government four equal numbers of development centers which favorably gave birth to oji River east development center in Oji River local government area of Enugu State.

Sequel to the above, the Oji River local government area now has Oji River Central, Oji River East, Oji River

South, and, Mamu River development centers.

Oji River Local government is made up of five major communities which in alphabetical order are Achi, AkpugoEze, InyiOwlaw, and Ugwuoba with 20 political wards. The local government borders Anambra and Abia State respectively and hosts several public and private organizations with markets like Nigeria Police College Oji River, Federal Cooperative College Oji River, School of Health Oji River, Ugwuoba Cattle Market, etc.

The actions of the Enugu state government towards the creation of development centers are in line with the new government structure which advocates for government ministries departments and agencies (MDA) to expand their services by engaging civil society organizations, mobilizing the grassroots populace to participate in governance in an atmosphere that encourages probity and accountability (Bakare, 2016). Bakare (2016) also maintained that accountability is crucial and will serve as a stabilizing force that will keep mobilized grassroots dwellers to remain active in local governance and minimize the tactics of corrupt public officials who usually don't want much presence of local people to avoid being called to account for whatever may have been allocated to them by the state government.

Is quite devastating seeing that some of the development centers in Oji River local government area after over a decade of existence don't have befitting administrative offices, not to talk of trained employees that could have the capacity to carry out any assigned task from the state government. Is worrisome to see such a good initiative of the state government not performing, the government instead using the centers mainly for political appointments of their allies

Communities that form Development Centers in Oji River Local

Government Area of Enugu State

S/N	Development Centers	Communities that Forms the Development Centers	Political Wards
01	Mamu River	Akpugoeze and Inyi	Inyi ward 1, 2, 3, Akpugoeze ward &
02	Oji River Central	Achi Uno	Achi Uno ward 1,2,3,4 &owlaw
03	Oji River East	AchiAgu	AchiAgu ward 1, 2,3, Utozi/Ugwua ward &Nzondu ward
04	Oji River South	Ugwuoba and AgbalaEnyi	Ugwuoba ward 1, 2, 3, Agbalaenyi ward &Okwe/Central ward

Source: Ugwuanyi, Nongo & Okiah-Chukwuma Field work 2023

Governance being the pattern adopted by a state, institution or organization to discharge its function at a targeted area and time, it could be referred to in diverse ways, though in this context, it refers to governance at the grassroots levels that render service to the people at the community or village level.

Grassroots governance does have some peculiarities in line with the ecology of each area, for instance, communities or villages in the riverside area must have different means of transportation which is critical in ensuring development compared to the communities and villages residing in dry land areas, that grassroots felt needs, resource mobilization strength, political participation, etc differs and continue to change as society evolves.

Some scholars have aligned to the claims that grassroots political participation is akin to having grassroots good governance. Political participation could be seen as an active engagement of the citizens in deciding who governs them and following elected leaders up to ensure that their campaign pacts are fulfilled. Is also a

process that involves people taking positions that could enhance their chances of deciding what could be done to improve their living standard and the best ways of achieving same (Bakere 2018). Unfortunately, grassroots dwellers cannot often compel political leaders to achieve the promises made to them during electioneering campaigns. (Bakere.2018) Political participation also entails activities directly or indirectly engaging the populace in the governance of their own country, state or local government via public policy initiation and execution, electioneering activities, and opinion polls (Nomor&Orijime 2018).

Good governance on the other side is very crucial to alleviate the sufferings of the masses. According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific:

Good governance has 8 major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and follows the rule of law. In their view, if the stipulated features could be abided by, corruption in governance would be curtailed and the downtrodden voice heard. Olomjobi, & Apampa (2015) added some features to good governance by insisting that good governance involves the linkage of certain elements like dependability, inevitability, transparency, and accountability to pave the way for the advancement of the life of the citizens.

Despite several features and concerns raised on grassroots governance, the most outstanding challenge is how to implement them to ensure an improved standard of living at the grassroots level.

Theoretical Framework

Hierarchy of need Theory by Abraham Maslow (1943) is used as the framework of analysis of this study on the basis that the intention of Enugu State Government in establishing development centers is to expand the scope of government which will aid the actualization of physiological needs of the grassroots populace like food, clothing, shelter, water, healthy lifestyle, etc, security needs of those who can afford the physiological needs which will help to achieve social needs without isolation as a result of fear and boost the citizen's self-esteem which encourages effective participation in governance before reasoning self-actualization stage. The hierarchy majority of the grassroots populace falls within will serve as a direct determinant of the level of governance available within the affected area. For instance, in a local area where the citizens lack basic social amenities like access roads, safe drinking water, electricity, and access to primary healthcare, etc, such government can't claim to be offering good governance, at the same time one cannot positively expect such citizen to meaningfully participate in government activities because in local parlance there is a popular saying that one have to get the land before the mat.

Empirical Studies

Development Centers may not have much literature to the best of my knowledge but grassroots governance has received reasonable attention literature-wise. Efforts are geared by scholars to ensure that grassroots dwellers receive quality attention from the government to minimize the sufferings of the grassroots populace militated by the good governance gap at the grassroots level.

Bakare (2018) studied grassroots participation and democratic governance in Nigeria: Osun state in focus, survey research design was used while primary data through a questionnaire and in-depth interview was applied, and descriptive analysis with the aid of spss. The following findings were made like; limited government accommodation and responsiveness, lack of access to information about government programs, lack of trust in political office holders, and low awareness level of the people concerning their roles in governance are major factors responsible for low grassroots participation in the governance of the State.

Keshav (2018) studied transforming grassroots associations through community governance in Nepal. Primary data were collected using quantitative and qualitative techniques weight aged average index (WAI) method was used to analyze the quantitative data. Its' findings showed that overall community governance was effective.

Onwe, Ibeogu, and Nwogbaga (2015) studied the Role of Development Centres (Development Areas) In

Community and Grass Root Transformation: A Study of Amachi Development Centre. This paper focuses on the role of development centres (development areas) in economic and political development of local communities and grass root transformation. It is aimed at identifying the activities of development centres (development areas) in grass root transformation of communities in Abakaliki Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. The findings of the study indicated that; incompetency on the part of staff and management authority is partly responsible for the poor state of affairs in the various communities that make up Abakaliki Local Government Area. The study used descriptive method of research.

RECOMMENDATION

This study recommended that the established development centers in the Oji River Local Government Area should be retained, but not with the current state of confusion where the grassroots populace may not be able to understand the distinction between the roles of development centers and their mother local government area. The spreading of the development centers amongst different communities and political wards is also in order. The paper criticized the non reasonable impact of development centers as concerns physical infrastructures and service delivery to the grassroots dwellers as it affects the communities in each of the development centers lastly, there should be a harmonized policy document that will be made public defining in clear terms what the local people should expect from the development enters.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that the poor performance of development centers in Oji River local government area of Enugu state is directly linked to the deliberate abandonment of the institution they created. They are not considered important except during electioneering campaigns. Poor working environment, lack of welfare for staff, non-availability of operational vehicles, etc affected negatively the functionalities of the development centers which defeated the goals for their establishment.

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