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INTEGRATIVE GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP: A COMMUNICATION PANACEA FOR ETHICAL AND ACCOUNTABILITY JAUNDICE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

This paper considered the leadership and governance situation at the local government level in Nigeria, with the view to finding solutions to the ethical and accountability problems plaguing that tier of government. It was mainly a library research blended with some degree of observation. It notes that the situation is grotesque and needs remedy. Pivoted by the Basic Needs Approach by Ekong Ekong, the study equates Community Development Approach with effective communication and posits that the adoption of Community Development Approach would serve as a panacea to the ethical and accountability jaundice at the local government level of administration in Nigeria. To this end, Nigeria would be the better for it.

Introduction

From the earliest local government administration experiment during the colonial era, through the local government reforms in the 1970s, to the present dispensation which has a total of seven hundred and seventy-four (774) local government areas, one can safely opine that local government administration has evolved, yet remained durable (Brown, 2012). In its evolution, a critical and constant decimal has always been the commitment to getting the government nearer to the people and engendering development. This has been in spite of the system of government (military or democratic). Currently, Nigeria is ruled by elected and appointed public officials or functionaries. It is also arguable that the mode of their election or appointment and style of leadership as well as record of service delivery may not be acceptable to all of the people. The need to fashion out a structure and function that is acceptable to all could not, therefore, be overemphasized; hence, the importance and significance of this script in honour of a colossal trailblazer and Nigerian of distinguished academic competence,

Professor Ekong E. Ekong, OFR.

By way of delineation, the aim of this paper is to galvanize a governance and leadership structure that would be socially responsible and sustainably responsive to the needs of the people, with the utilization of raised ethical and accountability standards in the context of effective communication. This, it must be noted, is not predicated on a system or kind of government; but on the cultural reorientation of the major players in the polity. In order to achieve the task of this paper, emphasis will be placed on the following: issues of governance, leadership, the current situation, the way forward, and conclusion.

Governance and Government

Government is an institution of the state as well as the process, art and science of governing. As an institution of the state, the implication is the totality of the state machinery, namely: the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary. However, as a process, art, or science, it involves the ways, methods, manner or systems of ruling people and through which the activity of governance is carried out.

Taken from both points of view, government is functional and important in a number of ways, including but not limited to:

- Playing the neutral agent, an arbiter for the regulation of human relations, settlement of conflict, administration of justice, the interpretation of laws, and the punishment of offenders;
- Upholding the constitution and ensuring compliance to constitutional provisions;
- Making laws for the regulation of the conduct and behavior of people;
- Ensuring the maintenance of law and order;
- Providing essential welfare, economic and social services;
- Seeing to ensure the guarantee and protection of fundamental human rights of citizens, etc.

In sum, therefore, government presupposes the body of persons in the legislature, the judiciary and the executive, legitimately empowered to carry out the duties of the state.

Inherent in good governance is adherence to the rule of law. Of course, where there is rule of law, everyone is equal before the law but undoubtedly we still have a long way to go in this regard. Otherwise, there would not arise a situation where some members of the society live in opulence or scandalous wealth while others wallow in poverty. This is

an extreme form of economic injustice which does not exist without its adverse consequences. This queries the efficacy of government.

To John Fitzgerald Kennedy, *to govern is to choose*. The emphasis here is the absolute necessity that public servants deliver public services and goods in an ethical manner as systemic corruption contributes to the erosion of the rule of law. This should be in congruence with an independent and well-functioning judicial and law enforcement system which is needed to protect human rights and administer justice in an impartial manner. These are attributes of good government, the act of which is governance (Brown, 2015).

Chait, Ryan, and Taylor (2005) opine that governance has become a front-page story of discourse propelled by cases of acquiescent and negligent enclaves. Gardner (1983) advocates multiple intelligences as the bases for personal competence, while Birnbaum (1992) emphasizes cognitive complexity which underscores the ability to think and work effectively and concurrently in multiple modes, including: politicians, managers, entrepreneurs, culture makers, administrators, learners, etc.

As a principle, Chait, et al (2005) identified three modes of governance; viz:

(i)   The fiduciary mode, where officers are concerned primarily with the stewardship of tangible assets;

(ii)   The strategic mode, where officers create a strategic partnership with management; and

(iii)   The generative mode, where officers provide a less recognized but critical source of leadership for the organization or group. Arguably, when officers work well in all three of these modes, the group achieves governance as leadership. What a food for thought?

Leadership

Ekong (2003) sees a leader as one who initiates interaction with other group members and move the group toward the attainment of its goals or solution to its problems. As a complement, Forsyth (1999) opined of leadership as a universal phenomenon as groups. To him, leadership binds the leader to the led. Leadership is a specialized form of social interaction: a reciprocal, transactional, cooperative, and sometimes transformational process in which cooperating individuals are permitted to influence and motivate others to promote the attainment of group and individual goals.

Leaders are thus agents of change (Gibson, Ivancevich, Donnelly Jr., and Konopaske, 2003). Leadership is thus an attempt to use influence to motivate individuals to accomplish goals. It occurs when a group member modifies the motivation or competences of others in the group. The challenge here is that a leader can make a difference in measures of organizational effectiveness: production, efficiency, quality, flexibility, satisfaction, competitiveness, and development. Gibson, et.al (2003) add that a dimension of leadership is *transformational leadership* which refers to the ability to inspire and motivate followers to achieve results that are greater than originally planned.

Generally, leaders exhibit and possess some traits such as: abilities (skills), personality (emotional maturity), motivation (have relative power and act on socially acceptable ways in order to record success). Little wonder Ronald Reagan in Jay (1997:302) states:

> *To grasp and hold a vision, that is the very essence of successful leadership... everywhere*

Put rather philosophically, great leaders know their life's mission. They are focused and determined to pursue a mission; and that mission usually centres around helping other people. Such a leadership could inspire trust, ensure justice, and remain God-fearing. In its pure form, therefore, leadership exerts altruistic, positive and profound impact on a people, both in tangible and intangible ways. It galvanizes challenges and propels a people along clearly established path of development, achievement and progress. In this light, Mbanefo (2005) submitted that responsible leadership and good governance is imbued with:

i.   Vision and imagination
ii.   Commitment
iii.   Selflessness
iv.   Integrity and courage, as well as
v.   Clearly defined goals and aspirations.

It follows that for leadership to exert desired and lasting impact on society, it must be visionary. It must have an acute sense of where it wants to take the society, and how society can change for the better without losing its very essence and values. Thus the fundamental question every responsible follower should ask and every responsible leader should strive to answer correctly is: *"where are we heading?"*

Mbanefo in the same place aptly captures it thus:

> *Leadership, essentially, is the exercise of political, economic, (social), and administrative authority in the management, at all levels, of the country's affairs. Holding or occupying a high position and office does not define a leader or leadership. Leadership is not simply about waving the flag or singing the anthem. The indices of power and leadership are not more guns, personal wealth and paraphernalia and trappings of office such as motorcades and sirens. These are merely the visceral manifestations of rulership, not leadership.*

In sum, leadership is a structure, system, function, relationship, and process with the sole aim of raising the stakes of the led with sincerity and selflessness as the watch words. The question, however, is, having regards to our disposition, where are we located on the contour of leadership? Are we on the right path? It is time for self-appraisal.

Our response to the above question is incumbent on if we are ethical and accountable. Ethics has to do with what ought to be; what is right; what is morally correct; and what guides conduct (Etuk, 2000). Accountability is a management tool that is aimed at curbing profligacy. This regrettably has been reduced to mere financial figures with little or no qualitative attachment for a possible social flesh. This places accountability too much in the domain of too few experts who could easily manipulate figures.

Very practically, however, ethics and accountability have become a jaundiced pair in administration of local governments in Nigeria. This development is rather negatively costly and regrettably sad.

The Real Situation

There is no doubt that Nigeria has the natural endowments and human resources to record an enviable development output in terms of economic wellbeing, political stability, and social harmony. However, there is also no doubt that there has been a patent increase in the manifestation of the absence of real development. This is traceable to corruption which in all intents and purposes has become the very bane of Nigeria's society and leadership. Many Nigerian leaders practically see positions of leadership as opportunities for personal aggrandizement.

This, is indeed, a sad commentary on our culture. Our leaders have been found wanting on issues of transparency and accountability. This, according to Anya (2005) raises questions on their integrity. In the circumstance, trust, which essentially is the relationship between the leader and the led has been betrayed.

Quite frankly, as captured by Chinua Achebe, at different levels of social organization in the country, from the family, through the village, town, community, city, state, etc there has been ample evidence of leadership failure (Achebe, 1983 & 1987. Oyebode (2003) holds that we are yet to arrive at the stage of the best and brightest in this country, more so, as such persons are, lacking in the wherewithal to place them in leadership positions. Very succinctly he asserts in the same place:

> *The most invidious aspect of this is that when incompetents are enthroned, the nation becomes mired in slothfulness, mediocrity and buffoonery masquerading as leaders while better qualified elements either vote with their feet or adopt the "siddon look" posture.*

Accordingly, criminological viewpoints would argue that as they ascend the leadership position, they stifle the opportunity structure which brings crimes of multiple shades to the fore (Oliver, 2001, & Tepperman, 2006). As a result, the nation today is appalling, distressing, discouraging, fearful, intimidating, disheartening, and hopeless (Olanipekun, 2004). The economy is bad, security is getting worse, human rights abuses on the rife, and the picture is generally an encircling gloom. Local Government Areas as many as seven hundred and seventy four (774) in number are not given a pride of place. Their share of the national allocation as evident in their percentage which is pictured in our fiscal federalism justifies this claim.

Basic amenities are either not available or inadequate, standard of education is falling, the health sector is nose-diving, lately the sports industry has disappointed; the network of roads is appalling; the power sector is in jeopardy; the potency of agriculture which include food security, employment, export, raw materials, and foreign exchange earnings is hopelessly falling; unemployment rate is on the rise; the general conduct of the people is apprehensive and restive; electoral credibility is questionable and unsatisfying; the environment is increasingly degrading; threats to industrial peace are common-placed, corruption, etc all constitute an amalgam of the sordid state of the nation.

Most sadly, in the context, the local governments, the closest to the people have been starved with funds and quality service providers. The problems therein are blamed on the social structure where statuses, roles, and institutions are critically considered (Brown, 2015).

The Way Forward

In spite of the magnitude of decay that has characterized the nation, all hope is not lost. It is important to entrench good governance at all levels (particularly the local government level). Anya (2005) recommends a vibrant civil society which would help stem the tide of corruption and other forms of mis-governance. In addition, he advocates the need to adopt standards and codes of good practices in areas such as accounting, auditing, and corporate governance, as well as access to qualitative education, and improved health care services.

This work, while not doubting Anya's recommendations, however is poised to limit the possibilities to interactive governance and leadership on the chambers of ethical and accountability jaundice. In other words, this paper contends that local government administration is not really disposed to good quality ethics and accountability. To reverse the trend, it is the position of this paper that the antidote to corruption, ethical and accountability problems at the instance of integrative governance and leadership is inherent in community development as an approach.

Ekong (2003) perceives of community development as a method, movement, programme, or process of tackling problems of community organization. Notably, its meaning has responded to the changing attributes of the social world. For instance, in the 1920s, it was seen as a special development model for the rural areas of the British dependent states. Later, it translated to reflect the vehicle for progressive evolution of the people to self-government in the context of social and economic change. The colonial government at some point saw it as a case of mass education (Ekong, 1991).

In 1948, the Cambridge summer conference on African Administration influenced community development to mean a movement to promote better living for the whole community. And with an international status in 1956, the United Nations blue-printed community development as:

The process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to

improve the economic, social, and cultural conditions of communities, to integrate these communities into the life of the nation, and to enable them contribute fully to national progress.

Emphasis is on the participation of the people (all the stakeholders: women, youth, elders) on the one hand, and the provision of technical and other services in ways which encourage initiative, self-help, and mutual help. Residual arguments would point to the fact that the people themselves must first and foremost decipher their felt needs from their real needs; thereafter initiate programmes and projects towards meeting those needs; principally mobilizing the mass citizenry to participate in the process, and then possibly seeking and securing help from external forces.

If the citizenry is empowered to participate actively in the decision-making process of the locality, she will consciously participate in the process of implementing the programmes and projects, and as such will force the loosening of the stifled opportunity structure, ensure enlightenment, enhance the active participation in the dynamics of group function, and ultimately delete the jaundiced nature of ethics and accountability in local government administration. In other words, the leadership of the local government would not embark on programmes if such programmes did not originate from the people themselves. In the same vein, such leadership would not highjack the programmes from the masses. This process, Ekong (2003:400) argues, amounts to effective communication – a process of sharing messages (information) without any distortions for the development of society. Here lies the thaumaturgy of communication as a panacea to crime and criminality.

By the active participation of the citizenry (otherwise, effective communication), the following would constitute the natural sequence:

- citizens will be empowered with awareness;
- there should be investment on cultural re-orientation;
- accountability shall have been given a social character;
- value for money shall have been secured for community programmes and projects;
- the absorptive capacity of the local government area shall have been increased;
- such councils will no longer be rent-seeking, but would be given to internally generated revenue, as wealth would be created;

- in addition, rule of law (should) would be enhanced;
- credible democratic sphere would be built;
- special courts would be raised to enhance social control; and
- finally, as absorptive capacity increases, the need for an upward review of fiscal policy would be more favourable to the third tier of government.

By this, economic activities would blossom, after all, how can one generate revenues where there are no venues, nor avenues? The entire Nigerian system as a geo-political entity would be the better for it.
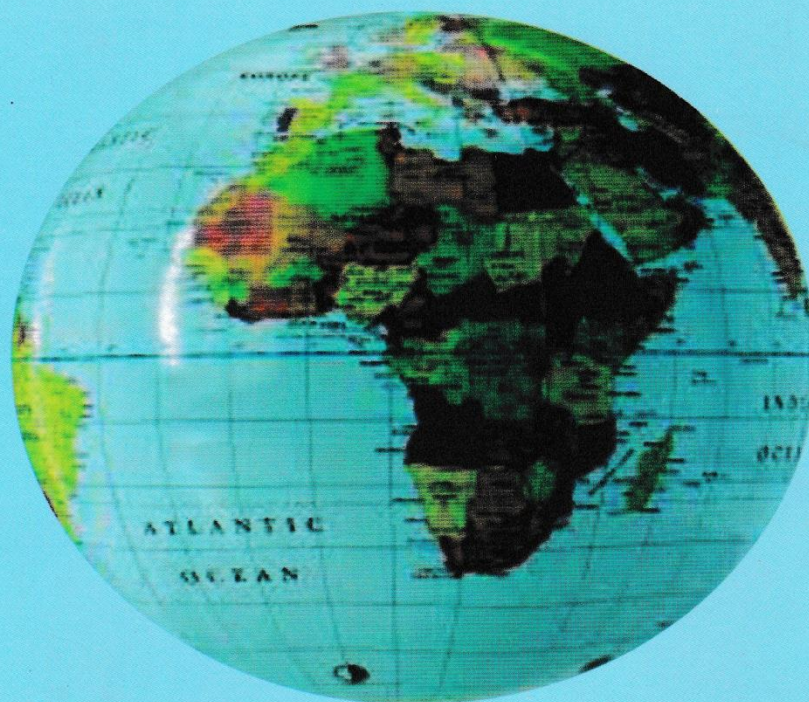
Conclusion

This paper has considered the concepts of integrative governance and leadership as the antidote for corruption in administration at the local government level. It recommends community development approach (in the context of effective communication) as the empowering force for integrative governance and leadership. The paper enjoins local governments to increase their absorptive capacities, and involve all stakeholders in the process of administration. It categorically calls for increased allocation for local governments since they are the nearest to the people, and as well, advocates cultural re-orientation. And finally, while acknowledging that leadership corruption is a cultural phenomenon, it advocates the creation of special courts in order to enhance social control through a process of deterrence.

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