

## **Towards Effective Physical Planning in Local Governments in Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** The role of local governments in physical planning in the Nigerian cities have been emphasized. The contributions of local governments to planning in the cities have been traced to 1900 with the subsequent evolution of legal backings. It was concluded that the local government system in Nigeria needs reconfiguration for effective physical development, especially in the area financing. Suggestions were put forward as to solution of these problems.

**Key words:** Local government, planning, physical development, areas, Nigeria

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The political restructuring of Nigeria started with creation of 12 states in 1967, which was increased to 36 states till date, this along with 774 local government areas were created. The administrative objective of creating a local government area is aimed at enhancing the performance of state functions, this coincides with its allocation functions, like the provision of public services and physical planning. Its importance has led to the Nigerian governments various attempts to reorganize schemes with the frame work and procedure to covert local governments into a veritable agent of the central government.

In most developing countries especially in Africa and Latin America, the role of the local government in towns physical development have been neglected, which have excluded the local populace from infrastructures planning and physical planning. This is in contrast to the case of the developed countries, where local governments are of paramount importance in disseminating services and physical planning and also included in their national development plans (Mabogunje, 1968).

Since, it has been agreed that the primary reason for the existence of the local governments is the efficient and effective provision of services that local governments enables the coordination of activities and functions at the local level. It is then pertinent to seek for ways of improving their viability (Gboyega, 1987; Ikelegbe, 2005).

Legal provisions such as the land use act of 1978, urban development policy of 1992, urban and regional planning act of 1992 and the housing development policy of 2002 were all legislative attempts that have given credence to physical planning activities in Nigeria.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study draws a systematic survey of physical planning mechanism, activities and agencies of governments responsible for physical planning. In addition, data was sourced from oral interview, published materials, journals articles and internet materials.

**The goals and the concept of physical planning:** Physical planning has been defined as concerned with the design, growth and management of the physical environment in accordance with a predestined guide and policies. Its goal is to make provision for the coordination of all forms of development activities at the national regional and local level.

Von Ludwig Bettanfy's in his general system theory put forward a framework that can be used in comparing, land policies, sustainable development and integrated land use management systems. In considering urban growth as a system, in particular a complex system, where everything affects everything else, there are transboundary effects of local and regional policies on physical development, where a negative effects of a flow in planning may effect the entire system and the positive gains will also be extended to their system, therefore physical planning should focus on efficient land use and management, which eventually determines the community character and aesthetics. It will also determine the convenience and frequency of reach to facilities, people's primacy and live ability.

However, in order for physical planning to play it's role of fostering balanced physical socio economic development. Its approach to development must be comprehensive and integrative, which must include the development of infrastructures like roads for the

movement of goods and raw materials supply of housing, hospital, schools. This can only be made easy through the grass root development and by the local government.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Legal provision of local government participation in physical planning in Nigeria:** Local government activities in physical planning in Nigeria can be traced back to 1900. Between 1900 and 1950, it was the Native Authorities who appoint regional government representatives at the local level, however planning here only addressed the needs of the colonialists without the people having a say, it was characterized by lack of administrative effectiveness and non performance of statutory functions (Adedibu and Okebukola, 1989). This led to the first local government reform of 1916, which was aimed at correcting the aforementioned problems. This was also later followed by the township ordinance of 1917, which mainly layed out rules for the preparation of town physical lay out plans.

By 1946, then came the enactment of the township ordinance, which was patterned towards the 1932 British planning act. This was to be a tool for planning improvement and developing the cities, villages and distinct in the country, to be implemented by the planning authorities or boards. This was the first legislation to formally monitor physical planning activities and gave it legal backing in Lagos, Nigeria. This was also later extended to the three regions then i.e., the Western, Eastern and the Northern regions under the town and country planning laws caps 123, 126 and 130, respectively. This law also had its shortcomings of lack of public enquiry procedure, non-participation of some tiers of government from statutory functions and the exemption of planning agencies from the development control activities. This brought up agitation for change, the main point in agitation for change was because the 1946 town and country planning law was a legacy from the British colonial masters and it lacked comprehensiveness of fit, which led to a call for a relevant practicable and pragmatic law to guide, control and give legal backing to urban and regional practice in the country.

It led to the promulgation of the 1992 urban and regional planning decree No. 88, for a more purposeful and realistic physical development. This decree is to cover the deficiencies of the erstwhile 1946 law. It shares responsibilities to the three tiers of government and power was devolved to the local governments for the preparation and implementation of town plans, rural plan and subject plan (In section 2 and 3 of the decree). This decree allows for public participation, the enforcement of development control machinery, it also gives room for public appeals as at when aggrieved.

The constraint faced in availability of land for physical planning seems to have been solved by the national wide reforms in 1976.

The 1976 land use reform accorded a lot of recognition on the local government as a distinct level of government with defined boundaries; it clearly stated functions and made provision for ensuring adequate human and financial resources, while imposing a national uniformity within practicable limits.

The 1976 land use reform introduced certain uniformity in critical elements of the government systems; this reform was followed by another land use decree in 1978, which was to usher in the final solutions to land problems.

The foregoing notwithstanding, Nigerian cities are still reputed to be the dirtiest, unsafe for living, most unsanitary. The cities are also said to be characterized by non-functioning infrastructural facilities, extensively dotted with illegal structures, uncontrolled physical growth and development and poor city management (Aluko, 2000; Aribigbola, 2008). This may not be unconnected to the concentration of physical plan implementation only to the state capitals, neglecting the other parts of the state.

**The local government as an agent of grassroots physical development:** According to Restler and Kanet (1993), the Local Governments (LGs) have been found to play the main roles of linking popular participation; legitimacy and democratic governance. Adedeji (1989) further asserts that the LGs formed authentic instrument for national development; which will eventually enhance national development and stability. It also builds a bridge of trust and legitimacy between the local people and the government. It has been found to ensure the provision of basic development needs and thus enhances the efforts of the central government.

The needs and importance of creation of local governments in physical planning has been reiterated in Gboyega (1987) and two schools of thought emerged, the first is the political school, which predicates local government as a democratic basis for the purpose of accountability and control; here it has been emphasized that it makes access to and participation in the community activity and governance easier.

The second school of thought sees the local government as an agent of effective and efficient deliverer of services, the LG helps in the coordination of the activities and functions of physical planning.

The first school of thought emphasizes on local autonomy, while the second depends on the coordination of state activities. Ikelegbe (2005) further emphasized that while autonomy through decentralization is directed at

local initiative, sensitivity and control of physical development, in the later school, it is directed at efficiency.

**Evaluating the performance of the Nigerian local government systems in physical development:** The performance of local government functions has been found to be poor, in the areas of efficient waste management and infrastructure development. Most of the LGs have been found not to have created opportunities for participation in local governance and development.

Evidence have not been found of local government planned, coordinated physical development several explanations have been put forward for this failure.

The first explanation is that the federal and state government control interferences and domineering influence have helped deny the local governments of political identity, autonomy and significance.

The second explanation is largely operational, arising largely from the behaviour, attitudes and poor performance of local government leaders (NPBR, 1987).

The third sees lack of people mobilization and participation in the political process as the reason for the lack luster performance.

The main problem the LG's are facing, which slow down their performance in developing physically can be attributed to finance. It was found that only few local governments can generate up to 5% of their total revenues, most are depended on revenue allocation from higher level of governments, the local governments do not have the capacity, legitimacy and integrity to effectively extract taxes and rates from the people.

The local government leaders shares the blame of the source of the problems, it was found that most of the local government chairmen lack orientation, they do not see their roles as that of active planners, rather they engage in resource appropriation or self accumulation and self aggrandizement, most of leaders are of poor educational background.

Other problems which one should not loose sight of is the paucity of data for physical planning at the local level, there are no data on basic socioeconomic status of the people, the land use, establishment and information on employment.

Also, most local government lack qualified town planners in their planning department, qualified planners are only found in the urban areas to the detriment of the rural areas.

Most local government areas have been found not to have a master plan to guide growth and physical development and where master plan is available it has

only been referred to move for violation than for compliance, since no fund is available for its implementation.

**Reconfiguring the local government system for effective physical development:** From the foregoing, it is obvious that the local government in Nigeria needs to be strengthened and reconfigured to make it an instrument of effective physical development.

To strengthen the local government, there is need for them to be made autonomous from the central government, to reduce interference in term of governance and project implementation, also in terms of capacity building for planning, budgeting.

The local governments have also to be repositioned as instrument of grass root mobilization, to link and partner with the communities' community development associations, youth groups and non governmental association in developing their area.

## **CONCLUSION**

The local government can solve their financial problems and may augment their professional staff, by resorting to sourcing funds from financial intermediaries and credit rating agencies because some of the credit rating agencies have the expertise to assist local governments in the preparation of plans and mobilizing resources. There is also the need for legal and administrative restructuring to be able to attract private participation; this is to ensure cost recovery to the borrowing agency. It should also be pointed out that in preparing a master plan to answer the needs and aspiration of local people, it must be broken down to a set of meaningful projects and projects with high credit ratings be identified to attract corporate investment.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The capacity of the local government to generate employment directly through anti-poverty programs is recommended, it should be directed towards the provision of basic amenities. The state government is also to take the responsibility of ensuring certain minimum levels of amenities are provided in the local governments, it may also fulfill this responsibility by engaging or supporting private organizations, NGOs and CBOs or by strengthening the local bodies. Therefore, rather than the state government encroach or subvert the LG roles, they should enable and partner with them, engage in collaborative development and physical development.

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