

MANAGING REDUNDANCY FOR IMPROVED SERVICE DELIVERY BY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

One fall out of the regionalization of Nigeria in 1946 was the emergence of variegated systems both in structure and title and in the functions of the local governments. Consequent upon the recommendations of the Dasuki Report, the Federal government sought and created in 1975 uniformed, single tier, all purpose local governments, designed to bring government as well as democratic dividends to the grassroots. However, prebendal politics, clientelism, the institutionalization of the federal character principle as well as political patronage have all combined to “over staffing” of the local governments in Nigeria. Hence, it is common knowledge that a considerable percentage of local government revenues is used for settlement of overhead costs, occasioned by excess manpower who do not contribute to the efficiency cum productivity of the sub-systems. Against the backdrop of the need for maintenance of structures that will aid sustainable development, with a firm believe that redundant staffs are anti-growth, opposed to efficiency especially as it relates to service delivery, and in line with the professed transformation initiative of the present government in Nigeria, this study sought to propose strategies for managing redundancy in Nigeria with the local government in focus. To achieve this, the conventional content analysis method was adopted in the treatment of data/information gathered. Thirty-six local government councils (six from each of the geo-political zones) were used as reference points on the assumption that the underlying reasons for redundancy are fundamentally the same in and amongst all the council areas. Consequently, it is hoped that the proposed strategies if adopted and applied in conjunction with other constitutional amendments, will place the council areas on the threshold of good service delivery.

KEYWORDS: Redundancy, Service delivery and Local Governments.

1. INTRODUCTION

As a system of local administration, local government exists in all countries of the world. The appellation or title, constitutional roles and status, degrees of autonomy as well as historical origin may differ. However, there is agreement by authors [1, 2, 3]), that local government involves the administration of public affairs in each locality by a body of representatives of the local community. As a unit of government closest to the people, local governments are supposedly instruments for the implementation of government development policies at the rural level. The importance of this tier of government did inform and accounted for why successive governments in Nigeria have endeavored to put in place institutional and legal frameworks to assist local governments in the discharge of their functions. Of these local government reforms in Nigeria, those of 1976 [4] and 1988 [5] stand out. Whereas, the 1976 local government reforms [4] established single tier, all purpose and uniform system of local governments in Nigeria (bringing to an end, hitherto, existing variegated forms of Local government, initiated to cope with the heterogeneous and complex nature of the Nigerian State), the 1988 reforms [5], amongst others abolished the ministries of local government and in its place, established the Local Government Service Commission, provided for direct allocation of federally generated revenues to local governments, as well as sought to separate executive arms with functions from that of the legislature.

Even after the Babangida era, successive regimes and government have made attempts to restructure, reposition and possibly revitalize local governments in Nigeria, with the hope that this unit of government will be able to attend to their core mandate as constitutionally prescribed. However, observable evidence and submissions of authors’ vis-visa local government

policies and administration show that local governments in Nigeria are confronted with a myriad of challenges making it difficult if not impossible for the local governments to deliver services efficiently as envisioned by enabling laws.

Most contemporary literatures on challenges of local government administration in Nigeria, apart from the problem of inadequate finance, focuses on limits imposed on local governments by the provisions of Sections 7(6) and 162 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria [6] as amended. Whereas, Section 71(1) of 1999 Constitution stipulates that the system of the local government by democratically elected local government council is guaranteed, it goes further to whittle down the powers of the local government with a proviso that the State provides for the establishment of the structure, composition and finance of such Councils. Additionally, Section 7(6) went further to state that the House of Assembly of a State should make provision for allocation of public revenue to the councils within the state. On the other hand, Section 162(6-8) of the same constitution not only provided for State Joint Local government account but also the modalities for the distribution/allocation of revenues pooled into the said joint accounts. On the premise of these constitutional provisions, it is the belief of some persons that the challenges confronting local governments in Nigeria will be addressed through constitutional alterations freeing local governments from the demonstrated whims and caprices of state governments. Obviously, local government has become appendages or extensions of State government; however, constitutional prescriptions alone may not offer enough antidotes to the demonstrated inefficiencies of the Local government *visa-vis* service delivery to the people. The contention is that, even if greater autonomy is given to these units even where the State/Local government account is abrogated, the increasing overhead cost incurred by local governments through the instrumentality of so many redundant staff will still vitiate the chances and possibilities of efficient service delivery of this third tier of government. The point of departure is that service delivery of local governments in Nigeria can be made more possible and effective through the management of redundant employees that has come to characterize Local government in Nigeria; the intention being that eliminating avoidable redundancy, will create a leeway in streamlining local administrative system that can function with fewest possible units and workforce, while at the same time accomplishing the goals of local governments as envisioned.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK/REVIEW

The concept of redundancy has come to represent different things to different people. For those in the physical and biological sciences, redundancy is viewed as excess capacity that provides option in the face of uncertainty. The idea of redundancy is embedded in concept of self-organizing systems... with self-organization referring to the process through which internal structures and functions evolve along with changing circumstances. These systems are able to diagnose errors as they occur, readjust the organism to minimize the effects of errors, and correct or permanently block the faulty component(s) [7, 8], simply put, a support system or precautionary measure. However, within the realms of management and social sciences, redundancy means a different thing altogether. Within the context of management science, redundancy was equated to layoff; a temporary suspension or permanent termination of employment of an employee or (more commonly) a group of employees for business reasons [9]. It is for this reason that synonyms such as downsizing, rightsizing and other euphemisms have come with the hope of describing the practice of redundancy which seem to becoming the preferred route to cutting costs, improving organizational efficiency and effectiveness and turning around ailing establishments.

More recently, some writers such as [10] and [11] have tended to regard redundancy as retrenchment. Though redundancy does lead to retrenchment, both do not mean exactly the same thing. Retrenchment may entail massive layoff of workers in an organization – a process of cutting down expenses through cutting down the strength of workers in order to reduce the operational and human cost of the organization. This is in alignment with Section 20(2) of the Labour Decree of 1974 that conceived redundancy to mean “an involuntary and permanent loss of employment caused by excess of manpower. By the provisions of Section 20(1, 2, 3) of the 1974 labour decree therefore, redundancy excludes voluntary and temporarily loss of jobs arising from employers deliberate re-organization calculated to reduce manpower. To the Employment Right Acts [12, 13], redundancy is the dismissal wholly or mainly due to the fact that the organization has ceased or intends to cease to carry on the activity for which the staff(s) was appointed or employed or has ceased or intends to cease to carry out the activity in the place which the staff concerned worked for or that the activities of such staff(s) are no longer needed.

On the other hand, the Labour Act [14] in Section 184(5), describe redundancy as a situation, where a worker’s employment is terminated by the employer, the termination being attributable wholly or mainly to the fact that the position filled by the workers is, or will become, superfluous to the needs of the employer. Note that the emphasis is on the positions and not on the worker who occupies the position. This process of disengagement is a derivative of the prerogative of management to determine the structure of the organization, nevertheless, does not eliminate the chances of the worker(s) being retrained or remodeled for other functions. The position is that though in close neighborhood, redundancy does not automatically translate to loss of employment, employee discharge and retrenchment. For the purpose, it is submitted that redundancy (in local governments) entails that people who are already employed and are willing and ready to work, do not have any/sufficient work to do. Therefore, redundancy is different from reasonable physical incapability; misconduct as such entitles a worker to some payment. Therefore, redundancy is work related and not anchored on employee personality.

Many reasons have been chronicled to account for redundancies in work organizations. Generally, redundancies have been premised on automation, outsourcing, changing duties and responsibilities, relocation, business downturn and recessions, innovations, organization development and the need to improve service delivery. Other reasons include market share is dropping, cost going up, the fortune of an organization reported in its turnover (sales/volume) and profitability is experiencing a downward trend, mergers, acquisitions, loss of major contracts, loss of or decline in funding, changes in customers' demands, and or complete closure of the organization [15, 16, 17, 18]. Apart from the general disposing factors to redundancy, this paper attributes excess manpower (redundant staff) in Nigerian Local governments to the following:

2.1 Recruitment induced redundancy

Recruitment generally is the process of searching for prospective employees and stimulating them to apply for jobs in an organization. Ideally, recruitment exercises seek to hire the right caliber of people to fill positions at the right time. In the case of many sampled local Councils in Nigeria, recruitment exercises as a matter of convention and practice have been by-products of political patronage – the act of dispensation of favours or rewards such that family members and other cronies are employed into the system in consideration for continued loyalty and support. The net effect of this form of recruitment is wide spread inefficiency, corruption and of course, the existence of avalanche of employees unequipped for effective service delivery.

2.2 Low attrition rate

Attrition rate refers to rate of employees' turnover. It is used to explain the rate at which employee cease to be members of an organization workforce. Turnover or attrition is conventional and natural as an employee is wont to leaving an organization either for personal, environmental or organization related reasons. It is the view of [19], that excessive turnover is detrimental to an organization's wellbeing, however, low or near absence of turnover may harm an organization. For many of the local councils, employees are known to have falsified documents relating to their age and employment generally, so that an obviously man or woman of sixty-five years (65) plus, has the contents of his or her file bearing different date and information. A consequence of this "stay-put" syndrome is that new ideas, methods and approaches are lacking, and a system without innovative capabilities will find it difficult meeting the challenges of service delivery of the 21st century. This is the case of many of the local governments in Nigeria.

2.3 Lack of capacity building

This partly results from lack of institutional framework for updating the knowledge and skills of employees. Some of the agencies established for purposes of manpower training and development have become comatose occasioned by inadequate financing, dilapidated infrastructure and a combination of other Nigerian factors of greed, corruption, ethnicity and the like. There is also self induced redundancy arising from deliberate refusal of particular employees to take the initiative to embark on the development of self; the consequence of this is that these employees are left behind, and ill equipped to face the challenges of globalization and competition. Other identifiable causes of excess manpower in the local government system in Nigeria include: outsourcing – that has shifted or transferred some of the jobs previously attended to by the local government and its employees, advances in technology such as automation- requiring less and less number of workers, political engineering and constitutional misrepresentations that have enveloped local governments and which in some instances have made state governments to attend to functions hitherto, carried out by local government councils.

2.4 Theoretical framework

On the strength that theories help to explain relationships, predict behaviours and refine practice, the paper adopts the eclectic model with the hope that these tripartite goals of a theory will be addressed. For this purpose, we think that the Systems theory, Redundancy theory and the Human Capital theory will suffice. In its simplest form, a system is a collection of interrelated parts which forms some whole [20]). Following the work of Katz and Khan [21], open systems (in this instance, Local governments in Nigeria) have characteristics to include import (the importation of energy from the environment), output (in terms of effective/efficient service delivery), negative entropy (ability to import and store energy that may be required for survival in difficult terms e.g. through auspices of redundancy management), and equifinality which proposes that efficiencies and effectiveness of service delivery by local governments in Nigeria can be made possible through administrative mechanisms, other than through constitutional re-engineering and legal enactments.

The Redundancy (information) theory was developed through the classic work of Claude. Though, with original applicability to solving mathematical problems, the theory is used today in the field of communication studies and management sciences. Following information theory, redundancy measures the fractional difference between the entropy of an ensemble, and its maximum possible value [22]. Informally, it is the amount of wasted 'space' used to transmit data the essence is to compress data to reduce or eliminate unwanted redundancy [23]. In communication studies, redundancy entails repetition of elements within a message that prevents the failure of communication of information; – by implication, 50% of letters/words in a sentence could be omitted and the message would still be reconstructable. In essence, information or communication theory provides a means of estimating redundancy or efficiencies of representation within a given system.

Deriving from these postulations are that redundancy translates to waste and that elements or units of a system (Local government) can be compressed or eliminated without the possibility of a system collapse. Human capital theory as developed and espoused by Schultz, [24] and Livingstone [25] assume that formal education is needed for improving the productive capacity of a people. The thesis of human capital theory is that the learning capacities of people (Local government staffs) are comparable to other resources used in production that can be exploited for the benefit of individual, organization and society as a whole. Education therefore, is key to increasing the level of cognitive stock and by extension, the productivity of the workforce. An expression of the fundamental reasons for human capital theory and investment was captured by [26] who rationalizes both theory and practice of human capital as: The need to encourage people to develop new ideas, products, processes and methods, that the new generation of people be made to acquire parts of knowledge already acquired and such knowledge be used to develop further ideas, meet new challenges, overcome obstacles etc. Encapsulated, the human capital theory provides a window of opportunity for employees of local governments consigned to the dustbins of redundancy by automation, mechanization, outsourcing and the like to be subjected to training, retraining and remodeling to make them fit into other units within or outside the local government system.

3. STRATEGIC OPTIONS FOR MANAGING REDUNDANCY IN LOCAL COUNCILS IN NIGERIA

3.1 Addressing the accession problem

This will require that local governments adopt procedurally job related and oriented approach to the accession process. Appropriate job design, description, definite job performance criteria in addition to personnel audit should precede all employment into the local governments. This will, if properly done ensure the right persons are appointed, doing what is profitable and beneficial to the system, a systematic approach to recruiting people into local governments should manifest or translate to non-employment of those whose services are not needed in the first place. The practice and the experience of having to pay cemetery attendants and cemetery supervisors (sometimes as many as eleven (11) of them in one local government) in local governments with no or non functional cemeteries would have become part of history. The money hitherto, paid to those category of workers will then be channeled into training of staff, maintenance of transport sub-system, which may aid service delivery. In summary, local governments should not only guard against over-hiring, temporary job/recruitment freeze is necessary.

Another option for managing redundancy lies in training, development and the conversion of some of these personnel to be able to attend to functions that originally were not intended. This position derives from the obvious facts that a large majority of local government staff in Nigeria are unskilled, ill-equipped and lacking in possession of administrative and managerial knowledge, wisdom and acumen requisite for efficient engineering of these subsystems. Proper, adequate, and periodic training and development programmes should be embarked upon to update the knowledge and skills of staff concerned. We must state that the training and development programmes should not be made avenues for increasing the earning capacity of staff concerned as have been the practice. Rather, a demonstrable evidence as to having updated skills, abilities and knowledge consequent upon training and development exercises should be part of appraisal cum promotion criteria for employees of local governments.

3.2 Tinkering with sub-structures

We agree that sufficient numbers of sub-structures may be okay to improve operational efficiency, however, we did observe that some units and departments in some of these local governments are duplicative, unnecessary, and should be collapsed or even eliminated. A re-evaluation of the working hours with a possible greater lead to flexibility of schedule is also suggested. Staff of units or departments affected by rationalization and realignment of structures should be retrained and possibly converted to carry out other assignments. A paradigmatic shift to agriculture, environment management, and other entrepreneurial ventures should be encouraged. Local governments administrators should look into the direction of the possibility of acquiring large expanse of farmlands and deploying these redundant and retrained personnel to work on these farms - a recourse to the farm settlement idea of the past will not be out of place.

Positive changes in philosophy and orientation of management and staff of local governments is key to managing and overcoming redundancy towards ensuring superior performance vis-a-vis service delivery. The notion that local government provides sources of employment and income (by way of salaries and wages) without corresponding discharge of functions should be discarded, the idea that government (local government inclusive) is foreign, alien and nobody's job should be put to rest, so that employees who fail to imbibe the new philosophy of reforms, who fail to show commitment and who are unable to demonstrate sufficient alignment with the vision, mission and administrative requirements of the twenty-first century, should be discarded with. Put differently, efforts should be made towards refocusing local governments in Nigeria. Part of our contention is that lack of focus may have derailed the activities of some of the councils leading ultimately to redundancy of the work force.

3.3 Encouraging early retirements

employee/staff should be encouraged to retire before the thirty-five (35) or sixty (60) years requirement. This is essentially so for those who may have viable alternatives. Early retirees will shed excess manpower, reduce overhead cost that should have been expended for payment of salaries, and monies saved there from, could be channeled towards other purposes. However, stimulating interest in early retirements assumes that success will be achieved if proper arrangements are made and procedural due processes are followed. Therefore, local councils in conjunction with the Federal and State Government put in place functional mechanisms of the payment of retirement benefits. In addition, collaborative arrangement should be made with viable cooperatives and funding agencies to provide seed capital for those voluntary or early retirees who will likely go into business.

3.4 Taking the not so pleasant option

Staff shedding or retrenchment done in pursuit of rightsizing remains a viable but not so pleasant option for management of redundant employees. Having people who are not needed, who practically contributes nothing to the success of a system, will likely do harm to the system. An approach to relieving local councils of some of their burdens lies in the retrenchment of staffs who take government money for doing nothing. However, retrenchment is known to have lots of psychological and socio-economic implications, therefore, should be approached with caution. Retrenchment exercises should be planned and administered preferable in conjunction with organized labour. The criteria for disengagement should be clearly defined, open, transparent, and proper communication done with those affected so as to reduce the likely negative consequences on morale and performance [27]. Therefore, procedural arrangements, execution and redundant payment plans should be put in place. The ultimate challenge is to combine restructuring with capacity building in a system that can enhance overall performance of the councils.

4. CONCLUSION

Local governments all over the world supposedly should serve as engine for rural transformation and development. However, against the backdrop of increasing number of redundant workers, the realization of the lofty goals of local councils as enshrined in the 1999 constitution, remains a mirage. Just as elementary finance teaches us that idle cash is a crime, having employees in the payroll of local governments, who add no value to the system in terms of services delivery, may be criminal, “arrestable”, and “jailable”. In this regard, we have outlined approaches that can be adopted for managing redundancies in local governments in Nigeria – approaches we consider as being capable of rejuvenating these sub-systems towards better and more efficient and effective services delivery.

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