



**HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT:  
AN ANALYTICAL DIAGNOSIS OF THE CASE OF NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

It is common knowledge that local government constitutes the third tier of government in Nigeria's political system. This constitutional mandate thrusts enormous functions and responsibilities on it. In order to accomplish these tasks, local government system needs effective and efficient manpower resources. This paper conducts enquiry into the challenges responsible for poor quality manpower resources in the local governments. The paper adopts historical/descriptive and analytical methods of enquiry and generates data solely from books, journal articles, magazines/news papers and the Internet. Findings revealed that with the advent of the Local Government Reform and the standard scheme of service, manpower challenges in the Nigeria Local Government System will improve significantly. The paper advocates among other things the strengthening of the capacity of the Local Government Service Commission to enable it embark on effective acquisition, utilization and development processes of manpower management in the local government service in Nigeria.

*Keywords:* Human Resources, Local Government, Employment, Training.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Generally, the local government is designed to bring governance closer to the people at the grassroots. In Nigeria, there are a total of 846 political wards across its length and breadth, and 774 local Government Areas, with an estimated staff strength of about 309,600 (Taking an average of 400 staff per Local Government Area). The grand norm for organizing local government in Federal States, such as the United States, Canada and Australia gravitates separateness and the subordination of local governments to state or provincial legislative authority. This, as Gboyega (2003:57-58) points out implies that in Federal systems, the norm is that States or provinces control Local Government policy.

Unfortunately, Section 7 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended ties 774 Local Government to the apron-string of State Government (and of the Ministry of Federal Capital which administers the six Area Councils of the FCT) to legislate for their creation, structure, composition, finance and functions. Although the importance of personnel (Human Resources) in the attainment of organizational objectives cannot be over-emphasized, this staff disposition in each of the 774 Local Government Areas, however, varies from one local government to another in terms of requisite knowledge, skill, and professionalism.

This disparity in staff mix has posed tremendous human resources management challenges and problems in the areas of acquisition, development, utilization and maintenance of this vital resources of the reformed Nigeria Local Government. Although it has been argued that three main resources – financial, material and human are imperative in the survival of every organization, the improper utilization of manpower to perform optimally and effectively or to manage the other available resources for effective performance in Nigeria's Local Government System is the problematique of this study.

The manpower, which according to (Stacy 1980:15) means “Human resource” requirement for the local government needs should not only require requisite knowledge and skill, they must have to be sufficient in number, quality and in the right mix in order to be able to perform the onerous and varied functions and responsibilities trusted on them by the constitution. This paper is an attempt to examine and explain Human resources management challenges and problems of Nigeria Local Government. It first highlights literature review, methodology and proffers solutions for the improvement of the Human resources management Situation in Nigeria Local Government.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The general focus of this paper has attracted the curiosity, questions and comments by authors, scholars and practitioners who shed their views and opinion on the subject matter of Local Government System. However, in order to facilitate a thorough analysis of manpower resources management challenges in Nigerian Local Government System, a thematic approach is utilized in reviewing relevant literature. This will enhance the presentation of state-of-the art knowledge on the subject under the investigation, and more importantly, establish the interrelatedness of the issues. Hence the review is restricted to two major concepts which the paper is premised, namely; Human resources management and Local Government System.

The Human resources management (HRM) is American in origin. Between 1970s till date, the human resources management appears as a replacement for personnel management which is described as a change in functional boundaries. Miller and Burack (1981:45) admitted that human resources management as a concept places emphasis on integrating human resources planning of organization. This marks a fundamental departure or change from an older maintenance personnel model. It is this shift in paradigm that (Burack and Smith 1971:61) characterize as Taylorism's “conceptions of control, efficiency, low cost and contentment of conflict”. However, the envisaged swift of emphasis even though regarded as semantic between the two concepts it does not really deter or alter the organic meaning of the two concepts.

Dchiler (1981:13); Foulkes and Liernash (1979:81) admitted that the two terms synonymously by them without any fundamental differences in meaning. On the other hand, (Armstrong 2003:41) admitted that human resources (HRM) is strategic and a coherent approach to the management of an organizational most important – the people working individually and collectively to contribute to the achievement of its objectives. According to Armstrong (2001), the main features of human resources management should include among others:

- An emphasis on the strategic management of people (the human capital of the organization) which achieve ‘fit’ or integration between the business and the human resources strategy.
- The treatment of people as assets, rather than costs – they are regarded as a source of competitive advantage, and a human capital to be invested in through the provision of learning and development opportunities.

- The performance and delivery of human resources management as a line management responsibility.

It is against the background of the forgoing, that (Hailey 1998), the early advocates of human resources management believed that organizations should move away from the bureaucracy of personnel management to the apparent flexibility and responsiveness of human resources management.

The genesis of the Human resources management challenges and problems dates back to the 1960s when regions, and later the states superintended over the affairs of the local government. Between 1951 and 1956 local government system was constitutionally a subject on the residual legislative list of the regions. The regions were responsible for the composition, structure, function and finance of local government and as they also determined the nature and quality of Human Resources needed to be recruited into the local government service. It is in the strength of this, that (Nkala 1986:135) noted “Most indigenous staff of local governments are the scions of an unsavory pedigree”.

This was the common feature that was practised in the Eastern region in 1950, after Sir, Authur Richard’s Constitution Conference. The bulk of recruits into local government service were predominantly “sons of the soil”, political stalwarts, even up to date, staff of local governments have not completely “shed those pristine spots”. The aftermath of this is that staff of the local government tends to be more at home under the patronage system. Collaborating this, (Bello-Imam 1996:64, 67) notes that recruitment into local government service is likely based on patronage. That only persons favoured by the ruling party elites were appointed into the local government service. The patronage system in the pre 1976 local government reform in Nigeria is likened to America’s spoil system during President Jackson’s leadership. Between 1980 -1983, American Local Governments especially in larger municipalities and cities provided veritable breeding ground for using patronage appointment to develop powerful networking “political machines”. (Fish 1935:79,104).

Onyishi (2013:13) describes the generalist nature of local employees as “clerks of works”. To him, “clerks of works” means personnel or administrative officers with minimal managerial acumen or role with little or no strategic contribution. His/her job consists only routine tasks of personnel records keeping and monitoring of auxiliary staff. Brown (1993:6,7) characterizes the poor status of local government employees in developing countries, including Nigeria as basing on “Rank-in-person” nature of manpower recruitment. “rank-in-person” system is a system in which the candidates at recruitment into the service carries with him or her sets of qualifications, independent of the position to be performed in a given moment. This contrasts with “rank-in-job” system enunciated by (Hudleston 1987:3). This is where manpower recruitment is based on the job itself and not on the person who might fill it.

Egonwam (1984:13), Isojola (1989:12) attribute the poor and low quality manpower resources in local government to the characteristic tendency of the state government taking over personnel functions of the local government, where competent and qualified local government staff are transferred or posted in exchange for unqualified or untrained ones to the employ of local government service. Emerson (1996:10) contrasts this position and posits that local government, as a distinct tier deserves to acquire its own human resources and effectively utilize them in other to remain afloat in competitive market. He frowns at over dependence on external resources which is very prone to risk due to the uncertainty that can not be controlled by the organization (Local government).

Pfeffer & Solansick (1978:16) confirm the usefulness of manpower to organization which should be regarded as scarce resources that should be acquired, developed, utilized and retained effectively. Olowu (1999:16) frowns at the negative and poor prominence accorded manpower in local government. He observed that before the advent of the 1976 local

government reforms, the operators of the local government gave priority attention to other aspects as physical, political functional and financial restructuring of the local government service and neglected personnel responsibility and functions. Ross (1984:14) amplifies the importance of manpower resources to local government in this way- “The only resources which can have an output greater than the sum of its parts is the human resources. (Armstrong 2001:41, Harbison 1971:61, Imagha 2001:151, Peters 2009:2,3, Rao 1990:71, Adelegyi 1978:2,3 and Cochrane 1944:45) all share in opinion expressed by Ross (ibid) and stress the vital component of manpower as being uppermost in achieving organizational objectives and goals. The former chief of general staff, Brigadier Shehu Ya Adua (1978:51) commends on political infringement and inadequacy of local government manpower resources in this manner: “The state government has continued to encroach upon what would normally have been the exclusive preserves of the local government- the staffing arrangement has been inadequate and excessive politicking has made even most progress impossible.”

A veteran labour leader (Oramulu 1989:411) attributes poor and low status of local government employees to the absence of scheme of service that impedes career progression, in appropriate posting and non-utilization of trained manpower in the local government service. That the privileged ones who benefited from employment either bribed their way through or sponsored by political office holders. This situation dampens the morals of local government staff as State Government indulges in frivolous posting of staff in and out from the service without regard to the rules of transfer in a scheduled service. The habitual state government’s interference in the affairs of the local government in has persuaded (Ikahariate and Onor 2003:99) to describe it as “castration and political hamstringing of the local government”. According to the United Nature Division of Public Administration, Local Government is “a political subdivision of a nation (or state) constituted by law (and vested with) substantial control of local affairs including the power to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such an entity is selected or otherwise locally selected (Adamolekun, 1984:92).” The 1976 Guidelines for Local Government Reforms defines Local Government as:

Government at the local exercised through representative council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas (That) gives the council substantial control over local affairs as well as provision of services... (promoting) active participation of the people... (The Guidelines for Local Government Reforms, 1976:1).

From the above definitions, Local governments aim at dispensing or decentralizing political power with a view to promoting grassroots democracy and development on the one the one hand, and effective mobilization and utilization of manpower resources to achieve envisage objective on the other hand. Atakpa, Ocheni, and Nwankwo (2013) conduct reappraisals on Nigerian Local Government System and effective manpower planning and point out that manpower planning and development for the Local Government System in Nigeria are done by a galaxy of discreet institutions such as the state and local government affairs, Abuja. The State Deputy Governor’s office, Ministries of Local Government Affairs, Bureau of Local Government Affairs, Local Government Service Commission, Local Government Council Chairmen, Directors of Local Governments and Heads of Service and Directors of Personnel Management (DPM).

The Authors opine that while the general policies on the condition of service of local government employees are made by the States and Local Governments Affairs department and the meeting of the key functionaries in charge of local government, the interpretation and implementation of this condition are left to the various Local Government Service

Commissions and the Directors of Local Government and Heads of Service in the various local governments where they exist. The authors regretted that the Local Government Service Commission charged with responsibility of personnel matters, particularly the recruitment, training, development and general staff development cannot decide on the critical determinant of staff development strategy. The commission lacks the much needed fund to follow logically and conclusively manpower development plan.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The fundamental objective of the paper is an attempt to explain manpower challenges and problems of the local government. In order to accomplish this task, the paper adopts historical and descriptive research methodology. Historical research is an explanation or narration of the past event objectively and accurately through personnel knowledge of the past, witnessing the event, and reading about it, or being told. On the other hand, descriptive research implies a systematic description of a situation, object, event, organism and place. The description should be factual, objective, and accurate. (Akpakpan 2003:15). The data generated for the paper however, are the totality of those scooped from documentary evidences and the Internet. The author himself as a life participant observer has served in the employ of the local government service for about twenty seven years – (1978-2005). Within this period and sojourn in the local government service, he has acquired enormous experiences upon which this paper benefited.

### 4. DISCUSSION

The literature review highlights the plethora of human resources management challenges which confronts the Nigeria local government before the advent of the 1976 local government reforms. Between 1951 and 1956, local governments were constitutionally subjects or agents to the regions and later the states. The regions were therefore responsible for the establishment, composition, structure, functions and finance of the local government. By extension, the regions controlled and exercised authority to hire and fire local government employees as they deemed expedient. As rightly observed by (Nkala 1986:135), the bulk of the local government employees were mostly indigenous staff who were characteristically referred to as “sons of the soil”. Recruitment of staff into the local government service was skewed in favour of political officer holders and party stalwarts. The advent of the 1976 local government reforms was, therefore, a welcomed development and watershed in the history of Nigeria local government system. The reforms reinvigorated the structural and operational deficiencies which beclouded the system. The Federal government through the instrumentality of the reform makes the local government service comparatively attractive for both Federal and State governments civil servants through the introduction of parity in salary structure and thus restores the dignity and prestige which had eluded the local government service in the past.

The advent of the 4<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Standard Scheme of service and the Handbook on Local government administration in Nigeria in 1992 amplify and remove the apparent dichotomy which had existed between the two services in terms of attractive services. Other innovations that came with the advent of the 1976 local government reforms is the establishment of the Local Government Service Commission (LGSC) nationwide to perform umpire role and oversight functions and responsibilities on staff recruitment, development, discipline, and promotion. It is also the first time the idea of ‘unified’ local government is brought into the lexicon of the service. “Unified” here implies the application of uniformity in all activities among all the 744 local government areas in Nigeria. In 1970, the Federal government also opened new frontiers of training in the three tertiary institutions of

University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Amadu Bello University, Zaria and Obafemi Awolowo, Ileife. To further boost a robust manpower development, one percent (1%) training fund was earmarked in federation allocations for the purpose of training middle level manpower in the local government service.

From the discussion, it is evident that the advent of the 1976 Local government reforms coupled with the institutional arrangement put in place, a lot has been done to remedy the bastardized nature of manpower management development in Nigeria local government. It is expected that the momentum the ongoing efforts has yielded so far will be sustained by the operators of the local government service, and the Local Government Service Commission as a key driver to make the local government a virile instrument of grassroots development.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Local government administration in Nigeria faces a plethora of structural and operational challenges and problems. It is, however, operational challenges that Alhaji Dasuki in his nationwide committee Report 1985 has identified as to bane of the reformed local government. To him, the operators are the local government's functionaries, including political office holders, career state and local government officials. This paper attempted a survey and explanation of manpower challenges and problems of the local government. The picture following the highlight of the literature review is that whereas local government staff is generally of low and poor standard, the generalist administrative staff elements are not of right mix.

The existence of the 4<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Standard Scheme of service and the staff Rules and Regulations have not yielded appreciative improvement in staff recruitment and development. The local Government Service Commissions, even though the membership composition is skewed in favour of the state government has not done enough to ameliorate the deplorable manpower challenges of the local government service. The characteristic dislike for local government as an inferior service is still feasible and has not changed as envisioned. In other to address this trend, there is need to strategize the implementation of the scheme of service to assuage the yearnings of the employees of the local government service. The capacity of Local Government Service Commission should be strengthened to enable it perform its statutory functions of rational manpower planning, which will tackle critical manpower acquisition, utilization, development and maintenance of the reformed local government in Nigeria.

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