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Local Governance and Public Service Delivery in Ghana and Nigeria



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Synonyms

Grassroots governance; Leadership; Local government; Municipal government; Social services

Definitions

Local Governance: This refers to the provision of political leadership to the people at the local/grassroots level. It implies the act whereby institutions of government make policies and provide public goods to the people at the local level.

Public Service: This refers to the entirety of services made available to citizens by the government and it is usually not for profit-making purposes.

Service Delivery: This implies the provision of certain services to a given people over a period of time. It is the provision of healthcare, sanitation and water services, electricity supply, among others, to a group of people.

Introduction

Across the African continent, governance at the local levels is as devastating as what is tenable at the national level, sometimes, even worse. While national governments have bulk of the responsibility to ensure the welfare of citizens, it is however correct that local governance structures are the closest to the people. As such, it is ordinarily expected that those at the helm of affairs at the local level of governance owe the people at that local level a good and quality life. They can provide this by way of qualitative and quantitative public service delivery to the people at the grassroots. While providing such public services is important, ensuring that the people for which these services are meant have uninterrupted and unlimited access to them is paramount. It, therefore, behooves of those at local level of governance to ensure public service delivery and actual access to these services.

The responsibility of providing quality governance and essential services to the people at the grassroots has been placed on local governments in most parts of Africa (Nwoba 2015). Such essential public services include, but are by no means limited to, primary healthcare services, quality education, security, sanitation services, safe drinking water, and reliable electricity, among others. In Western Africa, the condition of local governance and public service delivery is not different. Public goods and services still

vary largely in terms of quality and quantity across developing countries (World Bank 2004).

Nigeria operates a federal structure with 36 states and 774 local government councils. Given this structure, local governments are the closest to the people. Ghana operates a unitary structure with 16 regions, 228 districts, 792 councils, and over 16,000 unit committees at the smallest level of administration closest to the people. In Nigeria, citizens hardly have access to reliable electricity, good roads, safe drinking water, quality primary healthcare services, security, and quality public schools, among others. Often times, citizens have become government for themselves with little or no help from the state, especially from local level. Where some are available, quality and access continue to constitute major challenges. Even though a little progress has been made over the years, the question of quality, quantity, and access persist in Nigeria. Conversely, despite the public–private partnership on public service delivery meant to improve quality and access to public service in the country, Ghanaians continue to face difficulty accessing essential public services due to lack of facilities or service shortage in quality and quantity (Armah-Attah 2015: 3). Nonetheless, Ghana has perhaps made a little progress over Nigeria, but this fact has not exonerated the country from the general poor local governance and public service delivery ravaging the African continent.

Ghana and Nigeria could be regarded as leaders in the West African subregion, given their economic and political prowess. This justifies the choice of the countries for this entry. The entry thus compares Ghana and Nigeria on the basis of local governance and public service delivery. This is with the view to open up more comparative grounds for the countries and find a common local governance and public service delivery challenge (s) associated with the countries, West African subregion, and, by extension, Africa. By comparing the countries, the entry provides the opportunity for lessons to be learnt from both countries, while the country lagging behind can adopt methods from the one which has made significant progress over time. The entry also proffers way forward to address local governance

and public service delivery challenges in the countries.

Following this introduction, section 4 presents the evolution of local governance in Ghana and Nigeria. Section 5 is on the state of local governance and public service delivery in Ghana and Nigeria; section 6 is on access to public services in the countries. Section 7 gives the concluding remarks.

Evolution of Local Governance in Ghana and Nigeria

As early as 1982, the decentralization that was put in place by the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) had given rise to the local government structure in Ghana (Ahwoi 2010). This made provision for four-tier governance structure of regional, district, area, and town/village councils. In 1988, the LG Law 207 ensured that political, fiscal, and administrative powers were extended to the local and subnational structures. The LG Law 207 explicitly outlined the functions and responsibilities of each structures at the local governance level. With the draft of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, local governance was further enshrined and consolidated in the constitution. The 1992 constitution further consolidated the provisions of LG Law 207 and the two documents have since served the foundation of local governance in Ghana to date. All other policy guidelines and legislations on local governance in Ghana have derived from either LG Law 207 or the 1992 constitution, or both.

In Nigeria, local governance predated the colonial administration in the country. Long before the colonial masters established their colony in Nigeria, the country had local governance structures in place and these structures delivered essential services to the people. The evolution of local governance in Nigeria could be explained in three different epochs – the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial era (Agba et al. 2013). During the precolonial period, local governance was delivered to the people via traditional systems uniquely designed by each ethnic group. The traditional systems thus acted as local governments and provided basic services to their people.

During the colonial period, the colonial administrators met a working local governance structure on ground, hence, only needed to improve on them to achieve better efficiency. As such, they made use of native authorities. The native authorities were merely a rephrase of traditional systems as they were not different from their predecessor – traditional systems in terms of roles and functions. At the end of colonial rule in Nigeria, the regions resorted to their unique mode of local governance, with some retaining the traditional systems, some switching to elections of local authorities, while others relied on both systems. In 1976, there was a major reform in the local government and governance structure in Nigeria. Local government became officially and constitutionally recognized as the third tier of government and enshrined for the first time in the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The 1979 constitution, thus, spelt out the role of local government in Nigeria. This was also replicated in the 1999 constitution (as amended).

The State of Local Governance and Public Service Delivery in Ghana and Nigeria

The provision of public services to Ghanaians is a constitutional responsibility of the different levels of government from national to the local level of governance structure. Even though the national government retains the policy-making power over service delivery, the responsibility to provide facilities and implement such public service delivery policies is shared. The fact that local governments are closer to the people makes them more accountable to the people and are thus held responsible to bring essential services to the people. This is especially true for people at the grassroots. Therefore, while the Ghanaian Assemblies are responsible for the provision of basic education, the districts are responsible for sanitation services, public healthcare delivery, and environmental protection services. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Ghana, the country has incorporated the SDGs into its national development – the Ghana shared Growth and Development Agenda

(GSGDA) (Government of Ghana *n.d.*). This agenda is expected to be vigorously pursued by all the assemblies at the metropolitan, municipal, and district levels of the country. This has, to a long extent, impacted on service delivery to the grassroots in Ghana.

Like its other African counterparts, local governance and public service delivery still face critical challenges in Ghana. Owing to scarce resources and the rapidly growing population, urbanization, and development, public service delivery faces even greater challenges in the country (Armah-Attah 2015). To address this growing challenge, Ghana has explored the public–private partnership on the task of public service delivery. While this approach may come to the rescue of government, the reality is often that citizens may be at the receiving end of profit-seeking private sector service providers. This justifies, also, the skepticism and apprehension among Ghanaians on the prospects of the private profit-seeking sector to provide essential services to the public without exploiting them. The implication of this, therefore, is that while Ghanaians may enjoy better quality services and higher quantity of these services, they may have to pay more. This approach somewhat delegates government responsibility to private individuals and firms. Despite this development, Ghanaians continue to have difficulties accessing quality public services (Armah-Attah 2015: 2).

As of 2014, most Ghanaians were not satisfied with the state of public service delivery in the country. That year, 70% of Ghanaians claimed that the local government was performing “badly” or “very badly” in local road maintenance, while 75% were dissatisfied with the provision of reliable electricity. With respect to maintenance of roads and bridges, providing water and sanitation services, addressing education needs, and improving basic healthcare services, 68%, 66%, 63%, and 61% of Ghanaians respectively feel government was performing “badly” or “very badly” (Afrobarometer 2014/2015). Nevertheless, there has been significant improvement on public service delivery in Ghana over the space of 4 years. For instance, in 2018, only 23.4% of Ghanaians were dissatisfied

with reliable electricity supply, while 41% rate the maintenance of roads and bridges as “very bad” or “fairly bad.” With respect to provision of water and sanitation services, addressing education needs, and improving basic healthcare, only 33.6%, 17.2%, and 28.9% of Ghanaians, respectively, feel that public service in these areas are in a “very bad” or “fairly bad” state (Afrobarometer 2016/2018). These more recent ratings show significant improvements in public service delivery in Ghana over the space of 4 years.

On the general performance of local governments in Ghana, Ghanaians’ rating of performance at local government level and delivery of public services had witnessed improvement, signaling significant improvement in local governance and public service delivery in Ghana over the years. While 58% of Ghanaians “strongly disapprove” or “disapprove” of local government performance in 2014, by 2018 the percentage of such perception had dropped significantly to 33.8% (Afrobarometer 2014a/2015a, 2016a/2018a).

In Nigeria, local government is also the closest to the people and is, thus, expected to provide governance and public services to the people, especially at the grassroots. Albeit, there seems to be widespread perception and evidences over the years that local government has performed abysmally with respect to public service delivery (Obasanjo 2003). While the central and state governments legislate on most aspects of public affairs in Nigeria, local governments are, however, mandated to provide basic public services to the people, especially at the grassroots. Such services may include the provision of safe drinking water, maintenance of local markets and motor parks, maintenance of local roads, construction of primary healthcare centers and primary education, and provision of basic healthcare services, among others. Like in other parts of Africa, local governance and public service delivery have remained in a significantly poor state in Nigeria, with only a little progress made over the years.

Since independence in 1960, governance and public service delivery have consistently worsened in the country and many citizens have already lost hope and confidence on the government’s ability to

provide these basic essential services. Hence, most Nigerians have resorted to patronizing private sector for their security, health, and education services, among others. This development has no doubt reduced the value citizens place on government and public services in Nigeria. There continues to be dwindling trust among Nigerians toward government’s ability to provide quality governance and provide essential services (Mimiko 2018). What it seems Nigerians have accepted is the slogan “all man for himself,” a dictum which completely removes the existence of and relevance of government/governance. The people essentially do not feel government’s existence because the public services which are meant to keep the essence and importance of government alive are largely missing, leaving citizens to fend and struggle for themselves.

Quality remains a challenge with public service delivery where they are existent in Nigeria. Where public services are available, they are often grossly inadequate both in terms of quantity and quality. Local governments have failed to come to the rescue of the people at the grassroots. This neglect at the local level continues to manifest in poor environmental state; dilapidated school, healthcare, and market facilities/buildings; poor healthcare centers (Olusola 2011: 337); bad conditions of local roads; no or inadequate reliable electricity supply and lack of access to safe drinking water in most rural areas where local governments are meant to be most evident. Some challenges with local governments and public service delivery in Nigeria include institutionalized corruption, political instability over the past years by way of military intervention in politics, eroded local government autonomy, and controversial/confrontational state–local government relations. Others include inadequate local government funding, unprofessionalism of local government administrators, and poor work ethics among those in government, among others.

Citizens’ rating of local governance and public service delivery in Nigeria over a period of 4 years shows only a little and insignificant improvement. For instance, in 2014, 68% of Nigerians were dissatisfied with the state of electricity supply in the country, while 59.8% felt the maintenance of roads

and bridges were handled “very badly” or “fairly badly.” With respect to provision of water and sanitation services, 64.4% of Nigerians rated it “very badly” or “fairly badly” and 51.8% felt dissatisfied with government’s handling of improving basic healthcare services (Afrobarometer 2014/2015). Four years later, only a little or no improvements were recorded. In 2018, 63.3% of Nigerians still felt the government was performing “fairly badly” or “very badly” with respect to reliable electricity supply; and 59.3% still rated provision of water and sanitation services as “fairly bad” or “very bad.” While other aspects witnessed only a little, yet, poor performance, other areas only experienced a leap frog improvement. With respect to maintenance of road, fewer citizens (46.7%) rated government as performing “fairly badly” or “very badly,” while 48.6% felt government was doing “fairly badly” or “very badly” with respect to meeting education needs of citizens (Afrobarometer 2016/2018). Also, among ten selected public services in the country, only four were rated as being in “good” state, while others were rated “poor” (Idowu 2019).

On the general performance of local governments, in 2014, most Nigerians (63.1%) “strongly disapprove” or “disapprove” good performance, and 62.8% still held the same perception 4 years later in 2018 (Afrobarometer 2014b/2015b, 2016b/2018b). To date, not much has changed in terms of local governance and public service delivery in Nigeria.

The Question of Access to Public Services in Ghana and Nigeria

While the availability of public services is important, even more important is how easily accessible these services are to the people they are meant to serve. Access to basic public services are the citizens’ right and must never be treated as a privilege (Ofori-Mensah 2017). Albeit, accessing public services in Africa still remains a major challenge, with citizens having to pay extra as kickbacks at times to gain access to such services. Besides the aforementioned is the question of timing – the amount of time it takes before citizens

can gain access to public services, in the case that they are able to gain access. These remain a critical challenge in Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria inclusive. While this is a general challenge, the degree may differ significantly across board. Evidences show that Ghana is ahead of Nigeria in this regard, however, with only a slight difference, as access still constitutes a serious challenge to public service delivery in both countries.

While much remains to be done, the fact cannot be denied that Ghana has made some progress on access to public services. Prominent achievement by Ghana is the halving of the percentage of the population without access to safe drinking water (Ofori-Mensah 2017). Despite this feat, rural dwellers still suffer significantly from limited access to water (safe drinking water and water for general use). Ghanaians rate access to medical care in Ghana compared to a few years ago as “much worse” or “worse” (14.1%). While 36.6% claim it is “better” or “much better,” 44.9% Ghanaians aver that nothing has changed over the past few years. On ease of access, while only 3.2% Ghanaians aver that it is “very easy” or “easy” to obtain household services, 9.2% claim it is “difficult” or “very difficult.” Whereas 24.5% of Ghanaians posit that it is “easy” or “very easy” to obtain medical treatment in public hospitals, 19.1% say it is “difficult” or “very difficult” to obtain medical treatment (Afrobarometer 2016/2018).

Access to public services in Nigeria is not much different from what is obtainable in Ghana. While the fact is not only that public services are grossly inadequate to rural dwellers, with urban dwellers having more access, in Nigeria, access is also skewed to favor the rich and influential in society. As such, in an environment of grossly scarce resources, the rich and influential get the best of the services there exist, ahead of ordinary masses and the poor. Also, citizens often need to make some extra “unofficial” payments in order to gain access to certain public services in Nigeria. Where citizens are not able to bear this extra cost, they are often denied access. Access to health facilities, safe drinking water, and other household services remains a challenge, especially for the poor, middle class, and rural dwellers in Nigeria.

Access to medical care in Nigeria, compared to a few years ago, shows that 31.4% of Nigerians say it is “much worse” or “worse,” while 34.9% claim it is “better” or “much better,” and 33.4% aver that nothing has changed over the years. With respect to ease of access, only 13.1% of Nigerians posit that it is “very easy” or “easy” to obtain household services, while 19% say it is “very difficult” or “difficult” to obtain such services. On ease of access to medical treatment from public health facilities, 22.5% Nigerians claim it is “very easy” or “easy” to obtain medical treatment from a public facility, while 17% claim it is “difficult” or “very difficult” to obtain medical treatment from a public facility (Afrobarometer 2016/2018).

Conclusion

The entry has been able to show in a systematic manner, the state of local governance and public service delivery in Ghana and Nigeria. While it is not disputable that the state of local governance and public service delivery remain generally in poor conditions across the African continent, and, indeed Ghana and Nigeria; nonetheless, Ghana has made some significant progress in these aspects over a period of time. While Nigeria has not remained stagnant either, progress made in local governance and public service delivery has been quite slow and insignificant. Conversely, ease of access to public services in the two countries is similar and poor, with the poor and rural dwellers significantly marginalized. Governments in Ghana and Nigeria, and, indeed, the entire African continent must do more to improve on local governance and public service delivery and ease of access to these services where available. This is the only way the so much desired development can be achieved on the continent.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Good Governance](#)
- ▶ [Government Services](#)

- ▶ [Local Government Administration](#)
- ▶ [State-Citizen Relations](#)

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