

UNDERSTANDING THE ELITE THEORY AND RURAL UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Abstract: *The paper examines the threshold of the elitist theory and its underpinning application or relationship to rural under development within local government in Delta and Edo states of Nigeria. It is persuasive to averred that rural under development in Nigeria is not a news neither is it a scientific discovery because every nook and cranny of the areas speaks for itself in terms of all manners of human and capital under development that strongly persist or exist every where in the nation of Nigeria . Sad as it is Nigeria as a geographical entity is managed and control by government officials cadre that are broken down to the last level of government known as the local government which are hereby bequeathed with the cardinal responsibilities of rural management and development, yet it is not demeaning to state that these arm of government has outlived their usefulness due to so many factors amongst which is the sterile officials that make up the crop of the elite who could be regarded as the steering men of governance that has turn their subjective aspirations, desires and wills into the annals of governance instead of an objective desires that comes out of the local communities who are supposed to be at the center of it all. This state of affairs underscores the perpetual reasons behind the uncontrollable industry and super structure of underdevelopment created by these officials over the successive years of governance nationwide especially in Delta and Edo state as the area of analysis. The study made some salient recommendations among which are the idea of community development in concept and context should be popularized in our local communities so that people can also take responsibility of the development of their community serious however it is or look like, as it has always being argued that local government, laws should be repeal to tame the overwhelming influence of the elite against the system, laws enacted should be practice to the letter, the public information act should be effective for people to know when to hold government accountable as far as governance is concerned*

Keywords: *Local government, Rural areas, Elite Theory, Underdevelopment*

Introduction

Nigeria operates a democratic system of government which allows the style of representation on every level of government since everybody cannot be gathered to make a holistic decisions as it will end up in futility. The impossibility of everyone gathering to make decisions in the society allows or permit a few persons to be at the front burner of decision making since they are elected from the people themselves. This overwhelming

nomination, appointment and election from the masses has given the few overwhelming authority and privileges that are not at the disposal of those who elected them, this state of things gave rise to the elite theory of Gaeto Mosco who lived in (1858-1936) Vilfredo Pareto (1925- 1948), Robert Michels (1876-1936) where they adumbrated the influence of the elite on the masses. Mosca maintains that the elite have certain defining characteristics such as intellectual ability and moral superiority over the governed. Vilfredo postulates that in any society, the elite are the most talented and deserving group of individuals who are most adept at using two modes of political rule, force and persuasion. They usually enjoy import and “imperative” advantages or “opportunities” such as inherited “patrilineal prowess” in the form of wealth and “assorted” connections (Marshall, 2007).

It therefore, gives a rich underlining picturesque analytical frame work on the epochal factors or reasons behind the underdeveloped status of the nation especially at the rural communities levels of local governments in Delta and Edo states. The elite are found from the basic strata of councillorship to the local government chairmen, governors, house of assembly members at both the states, and the federal. This crop of officials forms the bulk of elites which make overlapping, overwhelming and intertwining decisions or indecisions that determine the pace of development or underdevelopment of a people because he who plays the pipe determines the tone.

That is why this paper is prepared or fashioned to interrogate the role of elite in the underdeveloped state of various rural communities in Delta and Edo states of Nigeria because indeed good or bad governance begins from government official elite and also end with the elite themselves. A developed nation is a product of multitude of good, dynamics and pragmatic leaders that are charged with the affairs of compassing the society whose civic, political and social responsibilities have been bequeathed to by the people or the masses that make up the entity of the states.

Rural Areas

The concept of rural areas varies from place to place. In the view of Olisa et al (1992) population is the major characteristics differentiating rural areas from urban areas. For instance, in Japan, rural areas are defined based on the population density indicating an area “other than an area with 5,000 people which consist of each district with a demographic” population density of 4,000 per square meter. Obasil, 2013 however, note that since the definition cannot be applied to other less populated countries, rural areas are also described as areas where majority of the residents are engaged” in. agriculture “as cultural way or take off stage of life. Other factors such as types of occupation, settlement patterns, and level of economic, social and political participation are also considered in defining rural areas (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2002). Harris (1982) stated that rural areas relate to places that have a relatively low population density where agriculture dominates the landscape and economy, provision of social service is difficult and where transport and communication need to “cover relatively large distance”. Bogoro (2009) defined rural areas in Nigeria as centers of deprivation where life is devoid of opportunities and choices and an environment lacking in infrastructural facilities including roads, water supply and sanitation, energy communication facilities “and lot more that alienate them from the urban environment”. Olaide, (1984); Raj, (2005) and Oruonye, (2013) asserted that major characteristics of rural areas in Nigeria are; large lands for

agriculture, low population density, little or no technology, large number of small scale producers, labor intensive and subsistence farming, high poverty levels, and predominantly illiterate population “devoid of a comprehensive education”. Scholars have also conceptualized rural areas in different perspectives. The modernization theorist view rural areas as being traditional and primitive. According to them, the major obstacle to progress and development in rural areas are internal, most especially their adherence or affiliation to culture. For instance, Rostow, (1960) and Lipset (1967) argued that economic conditions in rural and traditional areas are heavily determined by the cultural and social values in that given society. They stated that while modernization might deliver violent or radical changes, it is worth the price. The dependency school on its part argues that the main problem in rural areas is the “modern” but not beneficial externally imposed economic constraints of capitalism (Smith, 1979). For the dependency theorists, just as the urban areas in the developing countries is built to serve the interest of the western capitals so does rural areas in the developing countries serve to protect the interest of the urban areas in their respective countries (Muzaale ,1987; Binswager-Mkhize and Mcalla, 2009). However, there is a consensus among the different perspective about the need for improvement in rural living condition and the standard of the rural populace.

Socioeconomic Challenges of Rural Communities in Nigeria

Low Economic Indicators

In the early 1980s, global perception on socioeconomic development was centered on quantitative indicators like gross domestic product (GDP) and gross national product (GNP). Before that period according to Oyebanji (1983), Nigeria’s GNP grew from N220 per person in 1975 to about N298 by 1979 which was a significant growth pace. However, the question was whether the ordinary man on the street felt that growth. In all probability, he did not; and that was mostly due to high unemployment rate, corruption, inflation and derelict infrastructure, among other matters, which were troubling the Nigerian state then (Okafor,1983). It is quite disheartening that three and half decades after Igbozurike and Raza (1983) had conducted an investigation on it, the overall situation appears not to have improved. One burning issue, for instance, is the rapid rate at which young men and women continue to leave rural communities in search of a better life in urban centers. According to Paul, Agba and Chukwurah (2014) most development initiatives designed to foster development in rural areas are mostly inadequate, despite the fact that more than 60% of Nigerians live in rural areas. In their view Shehu, Onasanya, Ursula and Kinta (2011) the development initiatives have been designed mainly without the contribution of all relevant stakeholders thereby making them only good in theory and un-implementable in reality. The main programs which have been put in place over the past three decades by government to check rural underdevelopment and boost the economic status of the people.

Rural Development

Rural development like development had no unanimity of definition and has been perceived from different viewpoints and theoretical models such as the modernization approach, mobilization approach, dependency perspective or bottom approach. The World Bank in 1975 defined rural development as a strategy aimed at improvement of the economic and social living conditions focusing on a specific group of people in a rural

area. This is to assist the poorest group among the improvement of the living standards of the low -income people living in the rural areas on a self- sustaining basis through transforming the socio-spatial structures of their productive activities. It implies a broad reorganization and mobilization of the rural masses and resources to enhance the capacity of the rural populace to cope effectively with the daily task of their lives and with the consequent changes. (Malcom 2003) referred to rural development as the process of improving the quality of life and economic wellbeing of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. According to Alanana (2005), rural development could be regarded as a process in which a set of technological, socio-cultural and institutional measures are implemented with or for the inhabitant of rural areas with the aim of improving their socio-economic status or living condition to achieve a balance between the local and national sectors. Idris (2011) views rural development as a continued set of actions by government agencies, NGO's and the rural populace in improving the rural conditions of the rural people and a process which leads to series of changes within the confine of a given rural dwellers. Rural development had also been used synonymously with increased agricultural input and productivity. This was the major orientation of the colonial effort at rural development in Nigeria Muaghalu (1992) argued that the colonial philosophy of the British saw the rural area of the enclaves for agricultural production by insisting that there are few non-agricultural occupations in the rural third world. This perspective therefore suggested that modernization of the rural areas through the adaption of the basic production techniques such as mechanized system of production in the agrarian sector is a requirement for rural development is aimed at achieving the same goal of uplifting the rural poor. In support of this view, Idike, (1991) opines that the main concern of rural development is the modernization of the rural, sector through a transition from traditional isolation to integration with national economy.

This view was opposed by Neo-Marxist scholars such as Offiong (1980), Ake(1980) who posited that Nigeria's ruling class and wealthy business men made their money off the backs of the poor farmers in the rural areas through the marketing boards device and by serving as compradors to the multinational corporations in the colonial and post-colonial who are in firm control of the economy and dictate the manner and pace of the country's development. According to Marugba (1984), rural development is an issue contemplated on the desk of urban based planners who think the real function of the rural society is to produce agricultural products and maintain the urban system. He further opines that the skewed relationship between the urban and rural population has been the attitude under which first western cultures exploited rural societies, and now the same attitude prevails in developing countries including Nigeria. This point was corroborated by Ujo (1994) who asserted that the urban/rural divide emerged in Nigeria because of a deliberate policy pursued by the British Colonial Masters who concentrated all development activities in the urban areas

From the above definitions and theoretical perspectives, rural development is for improving the living standards and basic needs of the rural people. Therefore, all rural development efforts must be derived from the needs and aspirations of the rural population and not essentially in response to the needs of the urban political economy. Government should put sincerity at the topmost priority in the scheme of things as nothing can be left undone as far as rural socioeconomic development is concern in Nigeria.

It is worthy to note there have really been several efforts mandated by government from time past to birth socioeconomic development in rural communities which shall be considered in this study.

Evolution of Rural Development Activities in Nigeria

That community participation in rural project development is an important element and a sure way to the speedy development of the rural areas in Nigeria is well attested to in development literature. Hence, Okafor, (1984); Udoye, (1986); Muoghalu, (1986) and (1987) averred that the need to develop the rural areas and to a large extent, reduce the contrasting scenario of urban opulence and rural decadence led to much government undertakings strategy to uplift the rural areas in Nigeria. However, the evolution of the practice of self-help development activities has the following periodic dimensions; the pre-colonial, the colonial up to 1939, the period from 1940 to the Nigerian war, the civil war years and the post-civil war years to the present democratic settings (Ihenacho, 2013:2). Before the onset of colonial administration, communities across Nigeria had employed communal efforts as the mechanism for mobilizing community resources to provide physical improvement and functional facilities in the social, political and economic aspects of their lives. Communal labour was employed in constructing homesteads, clearing farm lands, roads or path way, construction of bridges and for the provision of other social infrastructural facilities required by the people. Some of the relevant institutions were the age grades and the village councils. Though in current times perceptibly, differences exist in the mode and scope of the operations in terms of equipment utilized and the extent of government involvement. As Idohe (1989) observed, in the past, self-help efforts in Nigeria particularly in Bendel States now Edo and Delta States mainly related to the construction of footpaths or roads, dredging of rivers and streams, clearing of public land and market places. Later, Idode further observed, the scope of operation included the building of schools and market stalls. Project such as pipe-borne water, road tarring, dispensaries, and cottage hospitals and so on, were not usually attempted. Furthermore, equipment used was simple; hoes, cutlasses, diggers and shovels were generally utilized. The construction of walls did not follow any standard measurements as the people used their imagination to plan and construct such projects. At this stage, there was little or no government involvement as the planning and execution of these self-help projects was the sole responsibility of the people. Where the government was involved at all, was for the purposes of taking over completed projects for operation or maintenance. But where neither the state government nor the local government councils were interested in such project, the missionaries took over (Isah, 2015:9).

However, during the colonial period, community development efforts took a compulsive and coercive turn. The alien government apparatus with its clientele (Warrant Chief) arrangement extorted taxes and compulsory labour from the people. Taxation by itself questioned the rationality of further labour conscription for road and other infrastructural development at the instance of the District Commissioner. The contradictions is the new development effort, therefore, did not form the corporate imagination of the people and this was given expression by the tax debacle of 1929, popularly known as the Aba women riot. It question the whole essence of the tax laws as established then, the imposition of the

Roads and River Ordinance and the apparent shirking of development responsibility by a government that had already extorted taxes for this purpose (Oyediran, 1980).

Apart from the establishment of governmental exploitative infrastructural apparatus, linking the major. Seats of government through forced labour, no serious self-help programmes eliciting popular participation was encouraged. Any development that occurred was by-product of profit (Hancock, 1942). Nonetheless at very local levels, the family, interfamily and village settings, the pre-colonial trappings of mutual assistance through self-help persisted for the construction of homesteads, clearing farmlands, clearing water points and for providing other socially felt needs. Church organizations were also able to cooperate with members for the building of schools. By the late 1940's however an element of modern community concept in rural development was introduced in the form of mass mobilization for self-help activities. This was heralded by the abrogation in Britain of the colonial development act which was replaced by the development and welfare Act in 1939. As rightly noted by Arndt, (1981), this gave a positive economic and social content to the philosophy of colonial trusteeship by affirming the need for minimum standards of nutrition health and education.

At the local level, the earlier native authority councils were replaced by the country council. Suffice it to say that this development led to the establishment of community development division at the local level and thus became an important organ of government, charged with the responsibility of channeling and coordinating the efforts of the people towards promoting social and economic development (Onwuzuluike, 1987). The development and welfare fund provided for the colonies by the British government was thus able to permeate to the grassroots level through this third tier of government.

By the beginning of the war in 1967, the observations of sir James Robertson, aptly typified the state of development needs and awareness and the immense role of the governments and expected self-help activities are to play to complement their efforts. After the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), the need for massive reconstruction work further aroused in the people a revival of the spirit of self-help which is deeply rooted in their rich traditions. Most communities realized that the only way for immediate reconstruction of the war-ravaged facilities was through self-help. This period also marked the evolution of a multiplicity of social clubs such as social insurance and self-help group (Nwakwo, 2005:2). Further efforts by government to motivate development at the grassroots, led to the enactment of the 1976 Local Government Reform to create new growth centers for further spatial spread of development. In addition is the creation of the local government service commission, the conferment of wider powers and functions to the local government aimed at generating more funds for community development at the local level. Thus, deliberate government support became necessary to increase the spate of development activities by the various communities (Akpomivie, 2017).

The period between 1973 and 2007 marked a watershed in rural development efforts in Nigeria. The period witnessed deliberate government efforts at mobilizing the people for rural development. A number of task forces and bodies were set to oversee, organize and to direct partnership with the people on self-help activities. They include: Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Rural Electrification Schemes; Credit Schemes to small holders through various specialized institutions such as People's Bank, Agricultural and Cooperative Development Bank, Community Banks, NERFUND, SME Credit Schemes, the Family Economics, Advancement Programme (FEAP), Universal

Primary Education Schemes and Low Cost Housing Schemes, Health Schemes as the Primary Health Care Programme, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life for Rural Women Programme as well as the Family Support Programme (FSP). More recent programmes includes the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), the YOUWIN program as well as the Small and Medium Industries Equity Investment Schemes (SMIEIS) (Aleys, 2012:33).

The various state governments had also articulated blueprints on rural developments, adopting the Integrated Rural Development Strategy as their strategic option to carry development to the masses. From the foregoing historical analysis, two principles underlying rural community development activities have emerged. These are (a) the principle of individual and corporate survival and (b) the principle of societal “felt need”. These two principles have variously acted as the motive force in organizing and mobilizing the people in their pursuit of self-development (Abdul, 2014).

From the foregoing, the journey to rural development quest has been a long time bound that continue to persist and exist in the Nigeria society and because the quest for development is natural in nature and exist in the innate state of men it will continuously become a matter of interest, conflict and also of peace. It therefore, gives a compelling clarion call so as to engenders satisfaction and a common hegemony to the center stage if not there will be continuous yearning for self-rule and cessation from the centre since there already exist a state of dissatisfaction of its people.

Rural Development in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic

The efforts to improve agricultural production in the rural areas started shifting to poverty alleviation and sustainable development in the mid 1990’s. poverty alleviation became a critical issue as most African countries were weakened by lingering conflicts and economic liberalization policies and lost their capability to implement rural development projects (Takeuchi, 2011). Because of the lingering issue of poverty in Africa, the World Bank announced its intention to revitalize activities of rural development during the Mid 1990’s (World bank Annual Report, 1997). African regional bodies also agreed to take measures to address challenges of poverty when African realized that about half of its population was living on less than \$1 per day. Subsequently, poverty alleviation and employment issues dominated rural development programs from the democratic era beginning from 1999. The New partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) was adopted by the assembly of African heads of state in 2001 as a strategic framework for African leaders to address poverty and underdevelopment throughout the African continent. The National poverty eradication program (NEPEP) an innovation of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development was set up also in the year 2001 by the Nigerian government with the responsibility of addressing rural development in Nigeria and related issues, training of youths in vocational trades to support internship, micro credit scheme, create employment industry and provide a social welfare scheme. To implement these programs, the government placed emphasis on complementation, collaboration between different tiers of government, donor agencies and non-governmental organizations. The general vision of the scheme was to bring about a participatory and sustainable development and completely eradicate poverty in Nigeria. It also had elaborate structure with the top agency being the national poverty eradication council (Bindir, 2002; Omah, 2004 Adoyi, 2010).

But after many years of implementing the NAPEP programme, the living conditions of the rural populace did not change since most of the programs carried out by NAPEP were concentrated in the urban areas. Poverty levels were indicated to have also increased from 54.4% in 2004 to 60% percent in 2010 (Ugoh et al, 2009; Akpan , 2012). Ugoh, et al (2009) and Randel, (2011) identified factors that have been contributed to the failure of NAPTEP to involve the rural poor, targeting mechanisms, failure to focus on the rural areas, programme inconsistency, poor implementation and corruption,

The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS: 2003-2007) was also introduced in 2003 as a medium-term strategy modeled towards the IMF's poverty reduction and growth facility to achieve some macro-economic goals of stability, poverty, wealth creation and employment generation. The programme was nationally coordinated. With State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) and the Local Government Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS). The LEEDS was to focus its effort in keeping the program in contact with the rural areas since it is the closest to the government to the rural areas (Omah, 2014; Randel 2011).

Compared to the rest of the poverty alleviation programs in the post democratic era, the NEEDS strategy was at least on record able to minimize the incidence of poverty in rural Nigeria. This was possible because it had a wider coverage and the involvement of the different tiers of government in reproducing the program within their respective domains (Adoyi, 2010; Akpan, 2012; Yahaya, 2019). Although it is quite statistically difficult to comprehensively assess the progress recorded by NEEDS in regards to its initial objectives of poverty alleviation and economic empowerment of the people especially in the rural areas, some studies, however argue that NEEDS was not different from previous public programs in terms of political commitment and implementation practices (Omah, 2004; Nwaezike, 2009; Adoyi, 2010; Yakubu and Aderomnu, 2011; Idris, 2011; Oruonye, 2013).

Agencies of Mobilization for Rural Socio-Economic Development in Delta and Edo States

The following institutions can serve and has always served as agencies of mobilization at the local communities' level as captured by Emeh, Eluwa and Ukah (2012:2).

a. The Local Government: The local government being the government nearest to the populace, is one of the best mobilization agency for generating motivations and encouraging mobilization for self-help, as well as including the much needed wider participation of the local population in the decision making process at the level. According to Edward Scouma (2019) "the so-called third world is a rural world where any meaningful discussion of rural development really means not only "talking of overall national development", but the hinterland because " it is in the rural areas that the problems of grinding poverty in which the wretched members of the society stagnate and stare one in the face with brutal clarity. The raison d'être of the local government in Nigeria is to at least halt the deteriorating living conditions in the rural areas of this country. An effective local government will be better disposed than the state or federal government, not only to stem the grim reality of the rising tide of rural poverty but also be more able to evoke the spirit of locality corporation thereby being more able to galvanize and mobilize the support of local citizenry in participating in all the programs that may affect them"

b. The formal but non-government:

In Nigeria today, there are no fewer than ninety -seven thousand (97,000) rural communities and government has been encouraging these communities to form development association. These associations will thus become agents at the cutting edge of development at the grassroots level. If these various individuals as well as associations are separate units and to take on the development of themselves and their communities in their own hands, they first have to be educated to the fact that they have to be empowered through political education to be willing to take on these responsibilities. This is where the directorate of social mobilization are working in concert to realize the objective of mobilizing the people to usher in a new era of integrated and authentic rural development which is human centered (Eme, 2012). In the rural and urban communities today, there are such formal and organized voluntary associations such as the town unions, community development associations, social clubs, corporative movements, professional bodies (National Union of Road Transport Workers), bar associations, medical associations, fraternities such as the rotary clubs, etc. whose membership and cultural affinities cut across the length and breadth of this country. Often time, these associations seek to promote not only the welfare of their members but also sporadically undertake the welfare interest of the society within which they live. Some of the members of these associations cut across ethnic and cultural cleavages and they could become veritable instruments of mobilizing local citizenry since they live amidst them

c. The Non-Formal Organizations:

At the community level it can also be defined as non -formal or not so well organized pressure group associations that equally can influence the local populace. These associations include market associations, student unions, Umuada associations, village elders' council etc. present day discovery has shown that these most critical local group levels of the society could also be used as mobilizing agents at the local levels of Nigeria (Eluwa, 2012).

d. Traditional/Institutions:

It is no longer a secret to know that certain persons, for example the traditional rulers possess and exercise great influence on the masses. Somehow, traditional rulers still enjoy the confidence and great respect of the greater part of Nigerian populations, to such a degree that they still remain undisputable force to reckon with for effective and successful mobilization of efforts. This statement is true in the South Western part of Nigeria, especially among the Yorubas and Bini's, truer in the Northern part of the country where the Emir, to a large extent, hold sway over the lives and activities of those in their domain; but less true in the South Eastern part of the country especially among the Ibos, the Ibibio's and the Ijaws whose egalitarian and republican way of live make them less amendable to unalloyed loyalty and unresolved obeisance to their traditional rulers

Also, these days of Naira chiefs (most of the traditional stools are keenly contested by various wealthy aspirants and since these traditional rulers are in-charge of various villages or communities, the views and status of the victor, after the usual life and death contest. May hardly be respected outside his own immediate village within the town). Therefore, excessive reliance on the so-called traditional rulers especially in the eastern part of the country for purposes of mass mobilization may boomerang especially if they are at logger heads with the people-oriented and people-elected interest groups such as town unions, social club, etc. Therefore, in the eastern part of Nigeria as opposed to those states in the

West and in the North, there should be a cautious use of agents of mass mobilization for self-help in rural development (Ogbalu, 2012:3).

Local Government Statutory Provisions in Nigeria

During the process of decolonization, the first famous elected local government council based on the British Whitehall model emerged in Lagos and the former Eastern and Western regions (1950-55). The councils were given a wider range of functions that include primary education, health, police, judiciary, autonomy in financial, personnel and general administrative matters. This was in line with the implementation of the colonial government's ten-year Welfare and development plan from 1946-1956 (Nwabuoze, 1982:20-21). Once the independence was attained, it was observed that there was decline in the prestige and responsibilities of local authorities in 1960-1966. In the former Western region, the local government Amendment law 1960 abolished the powers of councils to levy education and general rates on the basis of need. In Lagos, there was a high rate of default in the payment of property rates including government institutions, which reduced the revenue of the local councils. In Eastern Nigeria, similar footsteps from western region and Lagos were pursued. The situation in the north seems better, hence it enjoyed a remarkable historical success of indirect rule, there were gradual changes in the structure of the councils with increase in numbers of elected or appointed non-traditional office holders becoming members of local authorities. As a result, the local authorities had a stable administration that enabled them to assume responsibility with some degree of success. In the post of independence era, eyes are opening and people saw the need to have concrete LGs that can cater for their needs. During 1969-1971 number of state governments introduced some changes in the structure of their councils. The first significant attempt of local authority reforms occurred in 1976, under the local government reform provision. (Nwabueze, 1982).

The provision defined local government as: "government at local or internal" level exercised through representative council established by the law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal governments in their areas, and to ensure, through devolution of these functions to these councils and through the "internal" active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized" (Guidelines for Local Government Reforms, 1976).

Among other key point, the above definition strengthened the need for autonomy of the local government, ability to be elected at the local level and operate independently of the state and Federal Government. The Local government is no longer an appendage of field office of the state government. The characteristics of local government autonomy includes among other things; ability to make its own laws, rules and regulations; formulate, execute and evaluate its own lane and the right to recruit, promote, develop and discipline its own staff. To maintain effective local government, the Federal government in collaboration with the state government embarked on extensive reforms of local government in 1976. The objectives are to:

- i. Make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by devolving or delegating them to local representative bodies.
- ii. Facilitates the exercise of democratic self-government close to the grass roots of our society and to encourage initiative and leadership potential.
- iii. Mobilization of human material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development.
- iv. Provide a two-ways channel of communication between local communities and government.

The 1976 reforms celebrated landmark uniform system in the history of local government in Nigeria. The reforms recognized local government as the third tier “layer” of government operating within a common institutional framework with “internal or home grown” defined functions and responsibilities. It also introduced a multi-purpose single-tier local government system for the whole federation (Ajayi, 2000:70). The reform further put limitation criterion on population of within 150,000 to 800,000 considered feasible for creation of local government in order to avoid the creation of non-viable local council and for easy “or open” accessibility. Furthermore, provision was formulated for elective positions comprises of the chairmen as executive head of local government with councilors representing the cabinet that are responsible for implementing policies (Guidelines for Local Government Reforms, 1976).

The provision stated that 75 percent of members of the council are to be elected through the secret ballot on a no-party basis under the direct and indirect systems of election. The remaining 25 percent are to be nominated by the State government. The 1976 reform provisions also provided local government with statutory grants from federal and state governments. The Federal Government under the military regimes of former General Olusegun Obasanjo began to allocate federal revenue to local government in 1977 with 5 percent. The 1979 constitution takes a step forward stated that all local council members are to be democratically elected, and annulled the nomination of 25 percentages of the member as specified in the 1976 reforms.

During the second republic (1979-1983), the civilian administration ignored the constitutional provisions and no elections were held, instead sole administrators were appointed to administer the LGs. Another major reform occurred in 1991 during the military regime of Ibrahim Babangida (1984-1992) the constitutional provision on LG was restored. The reforms were improved with the abolition of the Ministry of Local Government, and replaced it with the establishment of executive and legislative arms in local councils. A direct allocation to local government without passing through state government was decreed by military junta. In 1992, Babangida administration further increased the number of local government from 301 in 1976 to 453 in 1989, and 589 in 1991. While the Abacha regime further increased the number to 774 local councils. Increase in the local government council in Nigeria was a result of new states that were created. Currently Nigeria had 36 states and the federal capital Territory with 774 local governments’ authorities (Ajayi, 2000:7).

Sub section 3 of the allocation of revenue under the federal accounts stated that: “subject to the provisions of this act, the amount standing to the credit of local government councils in the federation account shall be distributed among the states of the federation for the benefit of their local government councils using the same factors specified in this Act”.

Section 3 empowered the allocations to be monitored, supervised, and dictated to local authorities by their respective state government, hence the allocations are not paid directly to the local government but through the joint account of the state government (Otiye Igbuzor, 2007).

Apart from the federal allocations, state government is also obliged to share 10 percent of its internal revenue with the local authorities. "In addition to the allocation made from the Federation Account under section I of this Act to Local Government Councils, there shall be paid by each state in the federation of the state Joint Local Government Account (as specified in subsection (5) of section 162 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria) in each quarter of the financial year, a sum representing 10 percent of the internally-generated revenue for that quarter of the state concerned" (The Allocation of Revenue Federation Account, Act). The imbalance in the allocation is that, although states were empowered to disperse the allocation to LGs without any adequate guidelines. Several states therefore use the allocation to serve their personal political motives, or paid to their LGs in the manner that it will not be able to carry on any meaningful development projects for the society.

The Elite Theory and Rural Underdevelopment in the Local government of Delta and Edo States

Elite Theory is the model for our analysis. The elite theory in social sciences generally is the theory of the State which helps to locate and explain the power relations in the contemporary world and in this study between the central government, State and Local governments. The early proponents of this theory are Gaetano Mosca, who lived in (1858-1936), Vilfredo Pareto (1858-1948), Robert Michels (1876-1936) in their various postulations, emphasized the influence of the elite on the masses. Mosca maintains that the elite have certain defining characteristics such as intellectual ability, moral superiority over the governed. Vilfredo postulates that in any society, the elite are the most talented and deserving group of individuals who are most adept at using their inherited wealth and family connection (Marshall, 2007). The principle of the elite is that there exists in society, a minority of the population which makes and takes major decision that affects the general society and because these decisions have wide scope, they touch most aspects of the society. This underscores the preponderance and stratification of Nigerian states into local government system. These decisions are usually regarded as political decision even when the majorities are not politicians. At the early stage, the study of the elite theory was not given much consideration in the field of political science until the late 19th and early 20th centuries with St. Simon attempting to study the nature and character of the elite. Ikelegbe (1996:35) notes also that public policy reflects the value, aspirations and preference of the elite rather than the demands of the masses. It is based on self-vested interest in the protection of its status quo. They owe their positions to the control of the productive resources of the society hence one can talk of the military elite, religious elite, business elite, bureaucratic elite, political and the governing elite. The spread of the elite further explains the rationale for the proliferation of local government in the country which saw the growth in number from 301 in 1989 to 774 in 1996. The military within the context of elitism created local government for civilian political associates, kinsmen and also in their bid to legitimize their stay in power that the status quo can be retained. The outcome of all

these vested interest is manifested in non-performing local government that cannot take care of the staff salaries and wages not to of communities (Adeyemi 2013). The creation of these local government area is seen as military conspiracy that is further aggravated by the ruling political elite and their cohorts in their desire to remain relevant in the sharing that comes from these councils at the end of every month and this may have triggered the long debate on whom the institution of local government should pledge its loyalty. The elite theory emphasizes the roles of the political and economic powers which the proponents had earlier seen as the two types of instrument in the hands of the elite through which they control the resources and administration of the day and by so doing helping to protect and guide their interest hence one can talk of the political elite. The introduction of the sole administrator system in Nigeria local system in 1983 by then the military government headed by general Buhari was a clear demonstration of the military to control the affairs of the country through the local government system. There is an adage that he that plays the drum dictates the tone. The civilian who was selected to head these councils were from the elite class who were economically and politically related

The advent of democratic government has not changed much as many state governors have also adopted the elite model of preserving their choices and preferences ranging from caretaker committees to traditional committee depending on the semantics the states adopt. These activities in the system of local government continued to threaten the existence of local government as a separate tier of government, with autonomy to act indecently and the management of local affairs completely relegated. Pareto (1935) has presented the circle theory of the elite class that constantly engages in the changes in her attempt to have the grip over the people as a strategy that dominated the military regimes in Nigeria by constantly engaging in local government creation exercise without corresponding provision for their sustainability. Pareto (1935) had earlier sounded a warning to all elite that “there are problems that economics and politics cannot solve”. However, the military perception and notion were that the creation of more local governments will bring to an end the people’s agitation for self- actualization and legalized military in governance. It however turned out to be myth not reality and their actions further helped to polarize already tensed environment of the Nigeria political landscape. These councils have continued to create problems for state governments in the federation. It is no longer news that many of the states have not paid their local government staff salaries for months. Therefore, the elite theory extricated in this study clearly explain the reason behind this ugly incidence found in our rural communities of Delta and Edo States. The bulk of the elites constitute the military head of states, presidents, governors, local government chairmen, councilors among others who continue to manipulate the constitution to suit their interest and also engage in swindling monies met for local government to execute their functions for personal aggrandizement under the guise of faulty constitutional arrangement perpetrated by them with arbitrary execution of decisions to perpetually make local government an appendage of their office instead of a distinct tier status.

Conclusion

The three tier government system adopted by Nigeria as a nation is done to ensure that everyone within the state is covered by the presence of government. Suffice it to be mentioned that aside these three super structure there are several agencies created by

government even with same functions that these super structures are meant to do. This leaves one with a continuous question of why then is this persistent dilapidating situations that seems to have come to stay or enjoy undue permanency in the fabrics of the society. Thus, it is too obvious that institutions or organs created by government are just a shadow or next to nothing if the human resources or materials in them are exhibiting anti purpose of creation code of conduct. It is highly incontrovertible that these human resources otherwise refer to as the elite are the primary element or forces why underdevelopment has truly become the norm of the Nigeria society and we cannot fail to mention that a government that is invincible among her people is an express invitation to anarchy because the people cannot continue to bear a piperonal acephalous system or state that the elite has come to create or produce in the nation that is a disservice to growth and development. The elite with alter dismay has turn and redefined the ideology of government to mean self gratification with impunity that shows it doesn't matter to them if the system is failing. Nigeria a country is perpetually ailing and hope seems to be evasive because every regime formed or crated has always been worst than the previous ones, leaving people in the continuous wandering in the wilderness of leadership disaster.

Recommendations

- i. The idea of community development as a self help or initiatives policy that enable or make demands for citizen to be out to build their fathers land or home should be adopted. It therefore mean there should be continous sensitization of all by opinion leaders,NGOs and any oportuned personnels in society to make people not to over relaxin community building, however they can with the little resources in their hands should be deployed.
- ii. Constitutional Reform/Repeal the cry for constitutional reform or laws that will enables the true functionally of the local government cannot be over emphasised. Local governmnet reform should be carried out to shade it from the elites overwhelming force.
- iii. Freedom of information act. The freedom of information act enacted in 2010 should be in continous used or utilize. Government activities, expenditures and disbursement should not be opaque to give citizens the rich opportunities to call for leadership accountability.
- iv. The study was carried out on only two states of the federation. It is suggested that further study should be carried out on the other states for holistic and comprehensive analysis and results instead of the partial derives of two states

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