Citizen's Participation in Policy Making at the Local Government in South Western Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This purpose of this article is to assess the extent and impact of citizen's participation in policy making at the local government in southwestern Nigeria. The paper is based on survey questionnaire carried out among 210 career officers on GL. 07 and above, and interviews conducted among 18 political functionaries and 27 executive members of some civil society's in selected local government in southwestern Nigeria. The findings showed that policy making processes in the local governments provided too little for citizen's participation but howeverc participation had significant impact on policy making in southwestern Nigeria local governments. Therefore, in this case it could be concluded that if more citizen's participation is encouraged, the southwestern Nigeria and the country would be better for it.

Keywords: Citizen's Participation, Policy Making, Local Government

INTRODUCTION

Citizen's participation in the policy has of recent attracted the attention of many scholars as many democratic governments have realized the need for a partnership with the public and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) for effective and good governance. The realities of increasing global inequalities have been of major concern to the international community over the years. This has led to an unprecedented declaration of solidarity and determination to rid the world of poverty at the dawn of the 21st century. The millennium declaration adopted at the largest ever-gathering of Heads of States in September 2000 committed countries (rich and poor) to do all they could to eradicate poverty, promote human dignity and equality and achieve peace, democracy and environmental sustainability.

More people participation in development has assumed the centre stage as an important condition for achieving accelerated and sustainable development. This can be globally as central element of the people-centered development strategy. In this regard, many development practitioners and agencies have emphasized the need to secure active support and participation of citizens in the policy making and development processes. Olaleye (2004) argues that this development not only brings about progressive reduction of material deprivation and social inequalities, but also promotes the growth of human capabilities and potentials. In Southwestern Nigeria, as in other regions of Nigeria, local governments find themselves at the centre of a great challenge and are being compelled to be transparent and accountable, and to be closer to the citizens, by opening up for partnership with civil society and the private sector. This process establishes the opportunities for citizens to take part in decision making and citizen discussions.

This study assumes that despite enabling legislative and institutional framework, citizen's participation in local government policy-making is low and of negative effect on service delivery; its aim at identifying the impact of citizen's participation and degree to which local government encourages civic participation in policy making in the Southwestern Nigeria.

Governance

Governance, like many concepts designed to explain social and political processes in

post-modern or contemporary society, is a relatively fluid and flexible term. Taken loosely, Kooiman (2003:4) argues that governance can be seen as the totality of theoretical conceptions on governing. Similarly, John and Cole (2000:81) argue governance to be a set of principles of governing encompassing much of the variation in different countries' political systems. By contrast, Rhodes (1997:15) sees governance as self-organising, interorganisational networks characterised by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the game and significant autonomy from the state. Consequently, governance can be used as analytical tool to explore different approaches to governing over time.

Democratic Governance

In democracy, traditionally, people use their right to elect their representatives, who then hold the bureaucrats accountable for implementing any decisions that affect the local people (Mollah, 2008). This is actually the common practice in representative democracy or representative local governance, where people elect their representatives and are ruled by them (Bardhan, 2002). That means people should participate in the governing process through their representatives to get services from government.

The empowered people usually come forward to protest against any anti-peoples' decisions. Hence, it seems logical to empower people first with their regular involvements in local government affairs, particularly in developing societies where people are mostly illiterate, not united and unaware of their civic right (Denhardt*et al*. 2009; Jabbra and David, 2004).

Participatory Democracy

Participatory democrats have argued that delegation of decision-making power leads to citizens' alienation from politics. They regard citizens participation as vital to democracy. The root of this view goes back to Rousseau (1978), who opines that the participation of each citizen in decision making is vitally important to the functioning of the state, laying the foundation for theories on participatory democracy. Modern theorists on participatory democracy do not limit participation to political decision making, but stress that participation should encompass such areas as the workplace and local communities as well (Putman, 1970; Marber, 1984). The structures provides for an elected chairperson and councilors through a democratic voting system. But in the absence of a firm legal and institutional framework, development program still are implanted in a top-down process where local people have limited access to the local government.

Local Governance and Local Government

Batty and Hilton (2003:164) consider local governance as the organisation of local public life by a range of community-led bodies, led by elected local authorities. Whilst Boivaird and Loffier (2002:16) define local governance as the set of formal and informal rules, structures and processes which determine the ways in which individuals and organisations can exercise power over the decisions (by other stakeholders) which affect their welfare at local levels.'

The arena in which local government operates is itself changing. Local authorities are responding to this loss of control by actively working with partners and taking forward the idea of 'community governance'; they have (paradoxically) had to become more proactive in the face of declining responsibility, and financial and legislative constraint (Wilson and Game, 2002:140).

Public Policy and Decision-Making

Decision is an indispensable element of cohesion and duration of any human activity representing the transition of thought to action. Therefore, the most general sense of decision is normal ending of deliberation in a voluntary act (Lalande, 1960). It is also a social act, deliberation of a person or group of people setting out the goals and objectives of an action, directions and how to achieve it, all determined by a particular need, based on a process of information, reflection and evaluation of means and consequences of carrying out the action" (Marinescu, 2003). To Dumitrescu (1995) however, decision is a line of action consciously chosen from any number of possibilities, in order to reach a particular result.

Decision-making is materialized after the completion of process conducted in a natural sequence of activities, from notification of a problem to be solved and to verify the feasibility of the option, from "deciding whether a decision is necessary" to decide if, finally, the decision implemented keep the same features and coordinates or is required to apply corrective actions. The view on the number and stages of decision-making process itself are different in specialized literature. According to Dumitrescu (ibid), these are (1) identifying and defining the problem, (2) analyzing the problem, (3) developing the alternatives, (4) evaluation of alternatives, (5) selecting the best alternative, (6) making the decision, (7) implementing decision.

Public decision making proceeds from established Public Policy. According to Anderson (1994), Public Policy is a deliberate course of action aimed at achieving a particular purpose, or a laid down process to be followed by an actor in addressing a problem of general interest. This means that public policy is targeted at bringing about development in the society.

Citizen Participation and Collaborative Decision-Making

One of the current definitions of participation implies that it is the inclusion of citizens in decision-making relating to their well-being and in the implementation of those decisions and not the commonly practice form of participation that only informs them (Bekker, 1996:40; Meyer *et.al*, 2002:59). Brynard, in Meyer *et.al*, (2002:59), perceives participation as "an activity undertaken by one or more individuals previously excluded from the decision-making process". Omenya (2003) views participation as a means of accessing resources, through broader collaboration of stakeholders and further posits that for participation to succeed, vertical hierarchies linked to the government bureaucracy need to be merged with horizontal relationship existing in community-based structures.

Hickey (2002:842) posits that the best approach to participation should be one that moves more towards the political view of 'citizenship participation' and converts social practices into self-governing activities. This means an approach that pays attention to improving citizen participation, particularly that of marginalized group and ensuring that civil society actively takes part in political discussion and decision-making (Fung and Wright, 2003:260). Hickey (2002:843) points out that the capacity of local poor to actively participate in development lies in an enhanced partnership between government and citizens that entails improved citizenship status and advances the right-based approach to development. Based on these arguments, Hickey (2002:843) posits that participation should be more than just empowerment and capacity-building, but also activist struggle for development as a right.

Collaborative Decision-Making

Proponents of this approach argue that this concept came up as a reaction to the failure of most governments' earlier citizen participation initiatives. Others, such as Ansell and Gash

(2007), argue that collaborative decision-making has transpired as a way of solving problems of policy implementation and high levels of political control.

Proponents of collaborative decision-making see it as an all-inclusive and discursive process of making decisions based on agreement between the government and social groups with interest in or concern over issues at stake (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Ginther*et.al*, 1995; Healey 1997; North 2000; Ansell and Gash, 2007).

People's Participation in Local Policy Making

Although people`s participation in government processes may be considered as old as the age of democracy (Dahl, 1998; Parent *et.al*, 2004), people`s participation has been considered an element in public service delivery, in different ways, since the 1950`s and early 1960s under different terms and names (Tosun, 2000). Some American researchers pointed out that by the 1960s it had become obvious to many people in an increasingly diverse American society that their interests were not being addressed adequately by elected officials (Cooper *et.al*, 2006: 77). However, though there was a debate on the emergence of people`s participation in development program, in the 1980s, it attracted wide popularity worldwide (Khwaja, 2004; Mansuri and Rao, 2004), and in the 1990s it became an important vehicle for rural development (Carley, 2006). Practically, now people`s participation gets the centre stage in development discourse, particularly in local development programs, as elected representatives in democratic governments have been seen by some analysts to have failed to represent grassroots in local development programs (Leighninger, 2005; Tosun, 2000).

In developing countries, the slogans of people or community participation or bottom- up approach' have been ushered into development programs by the development partners/ IDAs that provided aid assistance during the end of the 1980s. In fact, people`s participation has been introduced, together with good governance, as the vital element in achieving effective outcomes of aid assistance in developing countries. The failure of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) has lead the development partners to include people as a compulsory element, as a vital condition, in the aid supported development programs in the developing countries. Social researchers, side by side with donors, stipulated that good governance can only be achieved by incorporating the community's knowledge into their social and political life (Lowndes and Wilson, 2001).

According to Khwaja (2004), development works without people's participation failed to alleviate poverty and suffer from a lack of sustainability' claiming that community participation is an 'unqualified good' in terms of project outcomes and sustainability.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A number of theories of management and economics have been suggested as paradigms underpinning good governance centering on people's participation. The most important theories driving people's participatory good governance are: System Theory, New Public Management (NPM), and Public Value Theory. Liou (2001) also pointed out Principal-Agent Theory, Public Choice Theory and Transaction-Cost Theory, which created foundation for model of good public governance. All these theories, historically or recently, have had a great impact on the introduction and implementation of participatory strategies. However, because of word limitation all the above mentioned theories are not going to be discussed in details in this thesis. The following section looks at some of these theories briefly and attempts their application in the context of the development of the participatory strategies.

Theory of New Public Management (NPM)

In the late 1970s and in the early 1980s, New Public Management (NPM) Theory emerged as a key issue on the reform agenda in many developed countries mainly in OECD countries (Hood, 1991; Parker and Gould, 1999).The initial focus of NPM theory was on increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector institutions. The philosophical foundations of NPM with their emphasis on local participation through private sectors, have led to organizational economies and managerialism (Navarra and Cornford, 2005; Pollitt, 1995), sponsoring professional management and self-motivation in the centre to improve institutional performance (Martin, 2003). This is symbolized as paradigm shift when the rule-driven and highly processed old management style is replaced by a new strategy 'which attempts to combine modern management practices with the logic of economics, while retaining the core public values' (OECD, 1998:5). Researchers recognized eight main elements of NPM, which are: cost effectiveness ; greater transparency in service delivery; resource allocation; decentralization of traditional bureaucratic institutions; management efficiency within public agencies; disaggregating public service functions from their purchase; introducing stakeholder approaches; performance based management ; contractual services, performance based appraisal; and increasing emphasis on service quality, standard setting and public responsiveness (McCourt, 2002; Pollitt, 1995). All these elements of NPM, thus, have transformed the traditional role of local government management into a more active independent and economical pattern (Dollery, 2003:82).

However, many researchers indicated that the scope of application of the NPM paradigm in developing countries is less promising because of unsuitable economic, technical and socio-political institutions (Samaratunge*et.al*, 2008; Schick, 1998; Turner, 2002) while the ideas underlying NPM have certainly influenced many programmes in western governments (Hodge, 1996; Navarra and Cornford, (2005) identified that the reforms in governing bodies which came about by practicing NPM can be summed up under four major headings: marketisation, accountability, decentralization and efficiency.

 Whatever the level of contribution of NPM in establishing good governance, there is no doubt that NPM has potential for changing the traditional governing process. Through NPM, the governing process becomes multi-factorial, as opposed to the traditional uni-factorial state that runs services to the people. This new managerialism (Pollitt, 1995) may open a new avenue to the local people to see the governing at the local levels.

However, there are dominant limitations that apply to a number of NPM elements. This is generally caused by the lack of experience in NPM by the people at the local government because of the institutional issues involved. These limitations may be a result of several binding constraints on NPM implementation. Additionally, many doubt the ability of NPM to manage contracts, develop systems for monitoring and reporting, and constraints in capacity in its domain because of complex governance and institutional settings, resulting in a challenge for NPM to give more focus on citizenship and the role to various public agencies. It is as a result of these limitations of NPM that this research work complimented the framework of analysis with the Public Value Theory (PVT).

Public Value Theory (PVT)

The fundamental assumption of Public Value Theory (PVT) is to provide service according to the public interest (Bozeman, 2002). Public interest is defined as what people would choose if they see clearly, think rationally, and acted disinterestedly and benevolently (Bozeman, ibid: 148; Lippman,1955). Thus, this theory entails desired outcomes of public programs and participation of expected beneficiaries for the services when delivered by the

government bodies. Bozeman (ibid: 146) argued that 'Public value theory tends to operate at highest levels, focusing on specific desired program outcomes'. This theory induces public institutions to recognize public value of resources, goods, and services.

The rationale for this theory is its provision for a relational approach to service procurement. There is no divide between client and contractor; both see each other as partners looking to sustain a relationship over the long run and not be narrowly focused on any contract.

The New Public Management and Public Value Theories go beyond providing a choice of services to citizens to preserving public value such as equity, accountability and citizens' voice. These theories drive public management to the door of local stakeholders and use local knowledge to make more effective and sustainable development.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study used survey design, where questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was structured around a Likert scale. The respondents answered each statement based on five scales. The value of each response for these items on the questionnaire is as follows: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. This study design enabled us to purposively select three states, Ondo, Oyo, and Ogun among states making up the Southwestern geopolitical zone. All these states were created in 1976 and in different geographical axes. The selected states were further stratified into senatorial districts and simple random sampling method was utilized to select one local government from each of the senatorial districts for the research work.

Study Area

The study covered the whole of Southwestern states of Nigeria. The focus is on Citizen's Participation on Policy Making Process in the Southwestern Nigeria. In order to have a representative sample, the research was carried out along the three geographical axes of Southwestern Nigeria with one state selected from each axis. This gave room for spread and equal representation of Southwestern States. The states purposively selected were Ondo, Oyo, and Ogun.

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary and secondary data were used for the study. Questionnaire and interview were used for collecting primary data. Questionnaires were administered on Career Officers on GL. 07 and above in selected Local Governments in three states (Ondo, Oyo and Ogun) of the Southwestern Nigeria. Questionnaire and interview were used to assess respondents' opinions and perceptions of the subject. Two hundred and ten (210) copies of Questionnaires were administered and retrieved from the career officers on GL.07 and above in the selected local governments.

The sample size on which questionnaire was administered; using purposive sampling technique was two hundred and ten which is 10 percent of the total population. Data generated from survey were subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, using Chi-Square. To complement the data collected through questionnaire, interviews were conducted to deduce information from some political functionaries and civil society organizations executive members. Eighteen (18) political functionaries' and 27 executive members of the selected Civil Society Organisations at the selected Local Government were interviewed. The hypotheses formulated for the study were tested at 0.05 level of significance using Chi-square.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study used descriptive and Chi-Square analysis determine the level of citizen's participation and its impact on policy making processes at the local government in Southwestern Nigeria.

Table 1. Respondents' views on the Degree to which Local Government Encourages Citizen's Participation in Policymaking Process

no	Variable (Question Items)		SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
1	Local Government holds interactive sessions with the people in order to agree on policies and budget irrespective of different interest groups		2	85	24	48	51	210
		(%)	0.95	40.48	11.43	22.86	24.29	100
2	Local Government offers assistance by way of funding, advice or other support to local groups, cooperative societies or organizations formed by the people in order to participate in policies and budgetary processes		3	91	33	64	19	210
		(%)	1.43	43.33	15.71	30.48	9.05	100
3	Provides all-encompassing capacity building to strengthen the stakeholders' capacity to be able to perform in the course of policy making.		10	60	45	40	55	210
		(%)	4.76	28.57	21.43	19.05	26.19	100
4	Local government is committed to civic participation to the extent that enabling legal framework is provided to institutionalize and promote civic participation		2	85	30	54	39	210
		(%)	0.95	40.48	14.29	25.71	18.57	100
5	Local government places emphasis on openness that will enable the stakeholder to have adequate information to be able to participate adequately especially to take decisions as per their needs and priorities.		1	65	43	71	30	210
		(%)	0.48	30.95	20.48	33.81	14.29	100
6	Local government has established budget Time table and manual accommodating Civic participation		15	46	41	54	54	210
		(%)	7.14	21.90	19.52	25.71	25.71	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2013

Table 1 shows respondents' views on the degree to which local government encourages Civic Participation in Policymaking Process. The respondents were as kedif local government holds interactive sessions with the people in order to agree on policies and budget irrespective of different interest groups; 41.43% of the respondents agreed that local government holds interactive sessions with the people but 47.15% disagreed. Another question asked was whether Local Government offers assistance by way of funding, advice or other support to local groups, cooperative societies or organizations formed by the people in order to participate in policies processes, 44.76% agreed that they do; while 39.53% disagree. The closeness in the percentages from the two extremes may be due to the differences in what operates in the three states selected for the study.

Lastly, on the impact of Civic Participation, respondents were asked whether the Local government had any established budget time table and manual accommodating Civic participation and majority (51.42%) of the respondents disagreed; while 29.04% agreed.

Table 2. Showing the Chi-square of respondents' views on the impact of civic participation on policy making and budgetary process in the selected local governments

χ^2	df	P
235.771	28	0.000

Using statistical tables at 0.05 level of significance and df = 28, the calculated Chi-Square235.77is greater than the tabulated Chi-Square 16.9(χ^2 = 235.771, p $\leq$ 0.05). Therefore, sincep $\leq$ 0.05 the hypothesis which stated that Civic Participation had no significant impact on policy making and budgetary process in the selected local governments was invalid and rejected.

Findings revealed that majority of the respondents affirmed the following:

i.   More people participation in policymaking processes is an important condition for achieving accelerated and sustainable development, improved policy decisiveness and better democracy.

ii. Citizen's participation will not only bring about progressive reduction of service deprivation and social inequalities, but also enhance societal welfare.

iii. Citizen's participation in policy process at the local level increase social equity, and enhances accountability, transparency and reduces corruption.

iv. Citizen's participation in policymaking process has positive effect on service delivery as its leads to improved policy decisiveness.

v.   Citizen's participation in planning and implementation process of policy making is germane to rural development as programme implementation is made more efficient and effective.

Findings also showed that policy making processes in the local government provided too little for civic participation because of the top-down approach to local government policy making processes used.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that though democratic political process currently in place had improved political participation, there is still low level of Citizen's Participation in Local Government Policymaking Process, due to the willingness of government functionaries to hold on to power. It therefore recommended that major policy requirements for successful implementation of a participatory policy making process at the local government should be the creation of a governmental environment consisting of appropriate structures of local authorities.

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