

## CAN EFFECTIVE MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE SAVE NIGERIA?

\*Shade Amole

Many countries in Africa are facing various challenges such as limited infrastructure, lack of social services such as education, health systems and slow economic growth. Diversifying governance by allocating more power and autonomy to municipalities could effectively tackle these problems. In Nigeria for instance, the bulk of government functions are carried out at the presidential level without adequate oversight, which results into several projects being unexecuted or poorly executed.

In many developed countries, effective municipal systems decentralize governmental functions and brings the government closer to the people. Municipal governments ought to be responsible for social services such as libraries, parks, community water systems, trash, local police, zoning, land use, roadways and parking, through delegated authority from the State.

Nigeria as a country stands to benefit from an effective municipal government system. Nigeria has a population of about [190 million people](#), distributed in its thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory. An example that will be used throughout this article is Lagos State, the most populous state in Africa. The Constitution of Nigeria provides for the functions of local government which [include](#);

- Making economic recommendations to the State, collection of taxes and fees;
- Establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds and homes for the destitute or infirm;
- Licensing of bicycles, trucks (other than mechanically propelled trucks), canoes, wheelbarrows and carts;
- Establishment, maintenance and regulation of markets, motor parks and public conveniences;
- Construction and maintenance of roads, streets, drains and other public highways, parks, and open spaces;
- Naming of roads and streets and numbering of houses;
- Provision and maintenance of public transportation and refuse disposal;
- Registration of births, deaths and marriages;
- Assessment of privately-owned houses or tenements for the purpose of levying such rates as may be prescribed by the House of Assembly of a State; and,
- Control and regulation of out-door advertising, movement and keeping of pets of all descriptions, shops and kiosks, restaurants and other places for sale of food to the public, and laundries.

The roles assigned to local governments by the Constitution is comparable to those carried out by municipalities in developed countries such as the United States. In Nigeria however, majority of these functions are executed on the state level, which results in disparity in treatment of local

governments, depending on the tax bracket of its residents. Problems facing local governments are enormous, and a prime example of a state that could benefit from effective local governance is Lagos State. With an estimated population of about [21 million](#) and counting, Lagos State government ought to decentralize its functions to address this population growth.

Lagos is a megacity infamous for its lack of sanitation. Goal Six of the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals \(SDG\)](#) centers around ensuring access to water and sanitation for all. Water scarcity, poor water quality and inadequate sanitation negatively impact food security, livelihood choices and educational opportunities for communities across Africa. Often times, bad economics in terms of planning, and poor infrastructure are causes for water scarcity. Water supply and waste-water management operations in Lagos State is centralized in the state government and currently the Lagos State Water Corporation, the primary supplier of water in the state, is facing a [320-million-gallon](#) water demand gap due to the rapidly growing population. Additionally, the water crisis is further exacerbated by deteriorating infrastructure, political instability, and poorly regulated water laws. The result of the water crisis in Lagos has led to [detrimental consequences](#) for its residents, as child mortality and water-borne disease-related deaths have grown exponentially. The state water corporation is not equipped to run portable water pipes and wastewater pipes to every home and this has always resulted in the self-help system. Majority of households in the state provide their water supply via borehole drilling system and manage wastewater through individual septic tanks per building. These systems have proven to be inefficient, expensive and not environmentally friendly. With proper decentralization of functions, each local government in Lagos could establish their water utility and waste-water treatment plants and run pipes through households. The closer these facilities are to the residents, the more assurance that SDG 6 will be attained in Lagos State.

Another key problem that can be resolved by an effective local governance system is land use, planning and urban development. State governments in Nigeria have oversight on the mode and manner that land is used, without input from citizens in localities where the projects are executed. Zoning is a technique of land-use and urban planning utilized by local governments in developed countries like the United States. An effective zoning regime would regulate the use of land and properly delineate them into residential, commercial, industrial and mixed use etc. A state like Lagos could benefit from an effective zoning map, and zoning powers should be handled by local governments because of the ability to properly capture the changing scene in their localities, thus easing the congestion problem Lagos faces.

Local governments in Nigeria are a creation of the Nigerian Constitution and are of strategic importance to national development, but lack of autonomy is the biggest impediment to unleashing their potential. The level of excessive control and encroachment on local government functions makes it harder for them to exercise their authority as derived from the Constitution, which strips them of self-governance. Self-governance does not necessarily mean that the state government ceases to have control of the affairs of the local government, it only suggests that a *home rule* approach as practiced by some states in the United States of America be implemented

in a modified manner. [Home Rule](#) is a system that gives local governments governing authority to make a wide range of legislative decisions that have not been addressed by the state. It was created to help carry out the mission of the states at a local level because it will be virtually impossible for state governments to administer public safety, infrastructure and other social service structures. Without autonomy of some sort, the current system of local governance in Nigeria cannot be efficient.

The current local government system in Nigeria is saddled with lack of skilled workforce and professionals that possess the knowledge and experience to propose and implement transformative ideas. In several developed countries, one would often find an educated local government workforce that includes engineers, attorneys, town planners, procurement experts, accountants and other professionals, that enable the government run efficiently. This educated workforce is supplemented by private entities who work for the local government on a contractual basis. Proper training for the current local government workforce in Nigeria and hiring of skilled workers is a solution that can easily be implemented.

Illiteracy of elected officials can hinder the creation of a successful local government system. It is the norm in Nigeria that only less educated people run for local offices. More educated candidates with transformative ideas run for state or federal offices instead. Local government reform in Nigeria would involve the encouragement of educated citizens with knowledge of their locality run for office. Participation of young educated citizens with drive and energy should be encouraged for the implementation of proper federalism and for the potential transformation of governance from the bottom-up.

Lack of funds is another hindrance to an efficient local government system in Nigeria. Funds are allocated by the federal government to the state and local government. These funds have reduced in recent years as a result of decline in oil revenue and national debt servicing. A functional local government area should have multiple streams of income generation and an investment portfolio that yields funds that may be used as operating costs. Various grants are also available worldwide that local governments in Nigeria can take advantage of to fund public, socio-collective and economic investments. Proper funding and accountability go hand in hand; thus, corruption must be tackled to enable the funds to be expended towards the most vulnerable needs in society.

To provide for Nigeria's growing population, proper federalism must be established, and it is recommended that government functions from the bottom-up. The federal government cannot efficiently oversee all thirty-six states and participate in effective foreign relations. To effectively handle Nigeria's population explosion, local governments should be given adequate autonomy to engage in extensive capital improvement projects to adequately address the infrastructure dearth in the country. It is already getting too late, but my recommendation will be better late than an avoidable disaster.

*\*The author is an Attorney admitted to the Nigerian and Florida Bar. She currently practices in the area of Municipal Law in the state of Florida.*

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