

Perceived Citizens' Reaction Over Local Governments' Financial Mismanagement in Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Citizens hide grudges they bore against those in power because of the consequences of their anticipated actions if displayed. The citizens are aware of the Federal and State governments' monthly allocations to the Local Government Areas (LGA) but they are not seeing the use of those funds. The opinion poll research surveyed the grievant actions the citizens would take when monies meant for their LGAs are misappropriated or embezzled. Thirteen of the 27 local governments of Imo State were used, and 50% of the adult population was proportionally selected for the survey. Questionnaire was used to survey the opinion of 1840 citizens. Data was analysed using simple statistic, tables and figures. The citizens expressed many dangerous and harmful actions they would take against the leaders; among them are killing them, and not voting for them in the next election. The paper recommends monitoring teams from the Federal and State governments to ensure the use of allocated funds for the development of the LGAs.

Key Words: Infrastructural provision, Local government administrators, Funds mismanagement, Poverty, Citizens.

Introduction

The citizens' cogent way of measuring local governments' development is by the provision of adequate social infrastructure by the local governments (Oviasuyi, Idada, and Isiraojie 2010). Transportation infrastructure helps move people and goods to markets, improves business competitiveness, and allows the economy to grow and prosper. Provision of infrastructure in many local government areas in Imo State is treated with levity. The intention of the Federal Government in creation of Local Governments is to develop the rural areas (Oviasuyi, Idada and Isiraojie, (2010); Nigerian 1979 Consitution; Agbakoba and Ogbonna, 2004). Local governments are government of the rural dwellers, government of the grassroots.

Ofoeze's (1997 and 2003) assert that local government areas are created to solve rural developmental problems and Late Shehu Musa Yar'Adua confirms that local governments are created to harness local resources for rapid development and to enshrine the principle of participatory democracy. These were not so in Imo State and this extra-ordinary research sought the opinion of the people of Imo State if this condition is not met. The assumption of the average Nigerian is that non-provision of job or poverty is as a result of misappropriation of funds or embezzlement by the leaders. If it is so, what will the citizens do?

The Federal government of Nigeria allocates reasonable funds to each of the 774 Local Government Areas in Nigeria (Orewa 1991). In addition, there are myriads of ways that the local governments generate revenue internally. Judicious utilization of the funds could translate to provision of jobs to the citizens. When this is not applicable the citizens react adversely. How will they react? What will their reaction tell the rulers?

Brief History of Imo State and Its Local Governments

Imo State was created on February 3, 1976 out from the old East Central State (when Nigeria was made up of only 12 States). In 1991 Abia State was carved out of Imo State leaving Imo State then with a population of 2, 485, 635 and now 3, 934, 899 as at the year 2006 (Source: National Population Commission, 2008). As at 2011 Imo State is made up of 27 local government areas (LGAs). Imo State has three Senatorial zones namely Owerri Senatorial Zone made up of nine local governments; Okigwe Senatorial Zone made up of six local governments; and Orlu Senatorial Zone made up of twelve local governments. Its Executive Governor as at 2012 is Rochas Okorocha. Major towns in Imo State includes Owerri - the capital, Oguta, Nkwere, Orlu, Aboh Mbaise, Mbano, Mbieri, Awo-Idemili, Ohaji, Obowo, Uzoagba, Emekuku, Orodo, and Mgbidi. The State boasts of abundant mineral resources which include crude oil, fine sand, limestone and natural gas, all in commercial quantities. The State is also blessed with massive agricultural produce such as palm produce, which is the major agricultural product of the state, cocoa, rubber, cassava, cocoyam, yam, and maize. Some economic trees like mahogany, obeche, gmelina, iroko, palm trees, and others exist. With all these resources very few industries exist in Imo State, mainly privately owned. Being in this predicament, how does the State survive?

Statement of the Problem

General observation has shown that Imo State's Local Government Areas are underdeveloped. The publics' speculation is that funds allocated to the local government areas had either been misappropriated or embezzled.

Communities suffered lack of amenities for good living such as electricity, good water supply, good road networks and other developmental infrastructures. Indigenes were disgusted with their condition of living. There was a high level of unemployment evidenced in high poverty rate noticed among the citizenry. These outcries informed this research: to survey the citizens' reaction on this condition of living bearing in mind that the local governments receive substantial allocation from the federal and state governments.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to harness the perceived citizens' reactions over their local government's alleged mismanagement of the federal and state governments' appropriation and the funds generated internally by the administrators. Secondly, to assess the citizens' reactions when Local Government's expected goals are not met.

This survey set out to harvest the opinions of the citizens of Imo State to know what they would do if they know that their local government administrators are mismanaging the local government's revenue. What will the indigenes of Imo State do to the local government Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, and other local government administrators who mismanaged or embezzled the local government's funds?

Significance of the Study

Without work, idle hands will be used by the devil to foment trouble in the camouflage of finding food to eat. When allocations meant for the local governments are well utilized, there will be infrastructural development which will eventually result in employment. This research hoped to intimate the local government's administrators of what is going on in the minds of their ruled so as to change their ways or to strengthen what they are doing well. This type of opinion poll research is not always allowed, but it is necessary. When the rulers are not told at their face the effect of what they are doing, whether good or bad, especially the bad, they feel that they are doing right and that there is no need for change. But when the leaders know how happy or bitter the citizens they rule are, about their style of governance, they may adjust.

Operational Definition of Terms

Local Government (LG): Local government is the third tier of government after the State and the Federal governments, and the closest to the citizens in Nigeria. Local Government and Local Government Areas (LGA) can be used interchangeably. Local Government Area goes further to mean the area covered by a particular local government. After local governments come Wards, Villages, and Communities in politics.

Citizens: Citizens in this paper means the indigenes of any particular local government. It means those living or resident in that local government whether it is their place of birth or not. As long as you live in that local government, whether you work in that local government or not does not matter.

Literature Review

Many Local Governments have created controversial Local Government Centres or Local Government Development Areas giving their reason as, solely, for provision of basic infrastructure to the rural areas. Imo State has 36 such centres and the Governor swore in their coordinators in September 2009 with an additional assignment of making sure that the communities pay their taxes promptly (Ohakim 2009). Creation of these Development Centres showed the importance attached to infrastructure and its recognition as an instrument for development.

At the root of development is good management of finance. Information on how funds are allocated and raised in the Local Governments is a perceived prerequisite to the judicious and effective use of the funds. Therefore financial information is deemed to be necessary for transparency and accountability in an organization (NEITI, 2005).

There are functions and responsibilities of the Local Governments to its indigenes. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, like the two previous constitutions, 1979 and 1989, significantly elucidates this. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria listed certain functions to be performed by local government councils. This is contained in the Fourth Schedule of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and each arm of government has its functions. When the functions are not met, the citizens are agitated.

The functions of the local governments are dualistic in execution. One aspect has to be jointly performed by the Local Government with the State government, while the other has to be performed solely by the local government. Both aspects have to do with information and development of the local government. Education - nursery, primary and adult - and their functional infrastructures are sole responsibility of the local governments. Planning for the development of the local government is also a discretionary power of the local government authority. When the roles are not performed, the citizens assume that the local government functionaries have embezzled the funds and may react adversely. The earlier the administrators know the intention or the result of such reactions the better for them and the citizens.

Revenue Allocation and Generation in the States

The Federal Government of Nigeria has a systematic way of funding the local governments. Local Governments get its resources from different sources. A formula, which is not stable, is used in sharing this revenue among:

Federal Government, State Government, Local Government, Special Grants Account or Special Funds; and different percentages were affixed dependent on the commission that recommended it (Adesina 1998; Danjuma 1996; Omitola 2005). Later, in post-civil war Nigeria, decrees on revenue allocation reeled out “which relied heavily on the principle of derivation and to a lesser extent, that of need” (Omitola 2005: 50). From here onwards sharing formula started taking another outlook. On-shore and off-shore oil royalties came on board and a progressive reduction on the “principle of derivation and the strengthening of the principles of needs and population” (Omitola, 2005:151). Imo State, being an “oil producing State” is assumed to be receiving a handful of revenue from the allocation formula which should reflect in infrastructure and employment of the citizens. This should portend that many school leavers in Imo State should not be looking for jobs.

Unnecessary Poverty in Nigeria

Poverty is one of the measures of underdevelopment, and Nigeria with its huge resources accrued from oil exportation is one of the poorest countries in the world. According to The World Bank and United Nations benchmark in measuring poverty (anybody who lives on less than \$1 per day is living below poverty line, though modified to \$1.08 a day ‘after adjusting for inflation to the 1993 U.S. dollar’) Nigeria’s 70.2% citizens are poor (The World Bank, 2007). It is unfortunate to note that of 90 countries on the human poverty index, Nigeria is the 59th. This is unfathomable with Nigeria’s huge income. The solution to this is entrepreneurship, job provision for the citizenry. This will be possible if Nigeria’s resources that are in the hands of the local governments are effectively used to provide infrastructure to empower the citizens in meaningful employment. Since it has been proved that an average public servant in Nigeria is corrupt, (Aluko (2004) enumerated different levels of workers and how they display corruption in their own ways), the best way to deal with this menace is to expose their activities (the activities of the local governments). The second is to openly show displeasure of their activities. This is what this paper addresses.

Methodology

The survey design was employed in this research because it is best used to find “out the opinion of a group of people towards a particular issue at a particular time” (Banji 2007: 100). Since the aim of this research was to seek the opinion of the citizens concerning their local government functionaries, survey research design was more appropriate. Surveys are usually more quantitative and easier to analyze and draw inferences from.

Imo State has 27 local government areas with a total population of Three Million Nine Hundred and Thirty-four Thousand Eight Hundred and Ninety-nine (3, 934, 899) (NBS 2008; Nigeriamasterweb.com, 2006). These local governments are distributed in three senatorial zones of Okigwe (6 LGAs), Orlu (12 LGAs), and Owerri (9 LGAs). Half of the 27 local government areas were used, in this case 13 of the 27 Local Governments. Proportionate numbers, according to the size of each local government, was purposively used in order to include the local governments in the outskirts of the cities (in the rural areas). The population of the 13 chosen LGAs is 1, 950, 149 as of 2006 census figure which was the latest as at when this research was carried out.

List of Senatorial Zones and LGAs Selected

OKIGWE ZONE	OWERRI ZONE	ORLU ZONE
1. Obowo	1. Aboh Mbaise	1. Oru East
2. Isiala Mbano	2. Ahiazu Mbaise	2. Oru West
3. Ehime Mbano	3. Ezinihitte Mbaise	3. Ideato North
	4. Ngor Okpala	4. Ideato South
		5. Nkwere
		6. Ohaji Egbema

The 13 proportionally and purposively selected local governments from the 27 were approximately 50% of the local government areas. Fifty percent of the local government areas were chosen because according to Surveysystem.com (2010:1) “The larger your sample size, the more sure you can be that their answers truly reflect the population”.

Probability Sampling Methods was applied with simple random and cluster sampling. Children of ages 0 – 15 and old people of ages of 65 and above were not used. The reason for using ages 20 - 64 was that this age group was desperate for work to make a living and they are the ones who could be listened to and their opinions taken seriously. This set of people was the target respondents. Both sexes were involved but not proportionally randomly selected in the sampling. Nigerian census does not have age range 20 to 64, so a formula was used to calculate the finite number of the population of the 13 local governments of that age range (see Appendix). The number used for this research was 1840 using Uhegbu’s (2004: 96) citing Krejcie and Morgan recommended 384 samples for a population of 200, 000.

Table 1: Selected Proportion of Employable Citizens Surveyed from the 13 LGAs

Local Govt. Area	Total Population Of the LGA	Worked Out Pop. No. To be Used (50%)	Finite No. Of Pop. To be Surveyed
Aboh Mbaise	196, 652	98, 326	189
Ahiazu Mbaise	170, 902	85, 451	164
Ehime Mbano	130, 931	65, 465	126
Ezinihitte Mbaise	165, 593	82, 796	159
Ideato North	158, 406	79, 203	152
Ideato South	159, 879	79, 939	153
Isiala Mbano	198, 736	99, 368	190
Owerri Municipal	127, 213	63, 606	122
Nkwere	80, 152	40, 076	77
Obowu	118, 114	59, 057	113
Ohaji/Egbema	182, 538	91, 269	175
Oru East	111, 822	55, 911	107
Oru West	117, 492	58, 746	113

Grand Total: **1840**

Uzuagulu's 1998 statistical formula adopted in Uhegbu's thesis (2004:102) was adopted to arrive at the formula used in selecting the population size for each of the 13 local governments.

The formula is expressed as:
$$\frac{n \times p}{N \times 1}$$

Where in this paper n = Total Sample Size = 1, 840; N = Total Number of Population to Sample = 959, 213; and P = Total Number of Population to be sampled in each of the 13 LGs. So to get the sample size for Aboh Mbaise, the mathematical application becomes:

$$\frac{1\ 840 \times 98, 326}{959, 213 \times 1} = 189 \text{ Approx.}$$

This formula was applied to all the 13 local governments to arrive at 1840.

The questionnaire was the instrument applied in this research. It was applied to each designed target group. The questionnaire was designed to obtain information with which to answer the research questions. A total number of 1840 copies of questionnaire were distributed to 1840 non-local government workers. Nine questions requiring Yes or No answer choices were posed to the respondents. Six field assistants were given two days training by the researcher to help in the distribution and collection of the data after which it was analysed using SPSS. Of the 1840 questionnaires distributed to all the groups of respondents, 1785 were retrieved while 55 questionnaires could not be retrieved.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

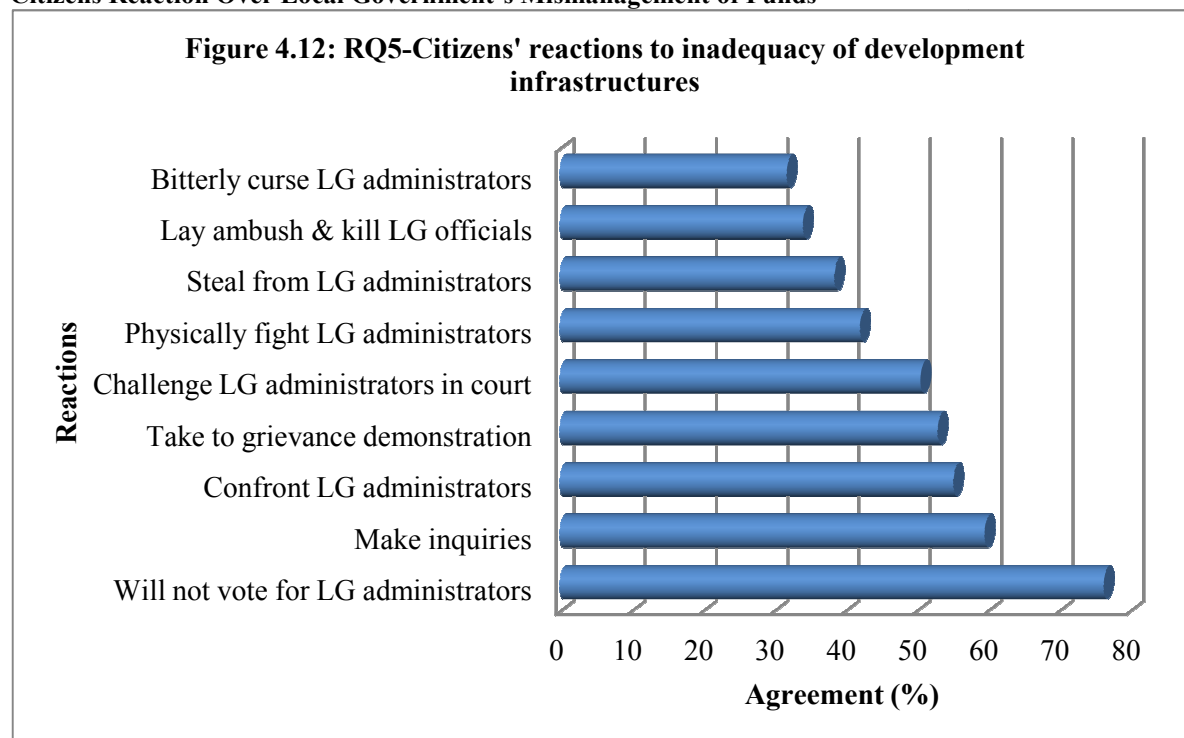
Data collected from each local government area was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) analytical package suitable for the type of data collected. Descriptive statistic was used in analysing the data collected with the use of percentages, tables, and graphs.

Forty-eight of the respondents (851, 47.7% ≈ 48%) were males and 893 (50.0%) were females. The remaining 41 (2.3% ≈ 2%) respondents did not indicate their sexes. Fifteen respondents, representing .8% did not indicate their marital status while 64.45 were married and 34.7% were single. 444 (24.9%) of the respondents were between 21-30 years, and 767 (43.0%) were between 31-40 years. Another 444 (24.9%) were between 41-50 years and the remaining 100 (5.6%) were between 51-64 years. While no respondent (0.0%) was above 64, 11 (0.6% ≈ 1%) respondents did not indicate their age bracket. Majority of the respondents were of reproductive age; only 1% did not indicate their age and less than that were between 15 and 20 years. Twenty-four percent of the respondents had primary education or did not finish secondary education. Thirty-eight percent had School Certificate while the remaining 38% had Teachers Grade Two certificate or other higher degrees. Altogether, 25% of the respondents were university graduates or HND holders.

Occupational Distribution of Respondents

Majority of the respondents were tailors (559, 31.3%) followed by teachers (542, 30.4%), hair dressers (291, 16.3%), commercial motorcyclists popularly known as "Okada Riders" (206, 11.5%), 108 (6.1%) were applicants, the rest were traders, commercial tri-cyclists, revenue collectors, clerical officers etc made the negligible remaining numbers.

Citizens Reaction Over Local Government’s Mismanagement of Funds



The citizens would take numerous actions against the local government administrators if they mismanaged the accruing revenues so much as to be unable to provide needed infrastructures for the citizenry’s development. The citizens would either inquire for reasons for the mismanagement of funds and the inability to provide the infrastructure (59.6%), or curse them bitterly (31.8%). The proportion of the citizens (40.4%) that would not want to inquire was significantly high. Therefore, it was not likely that this inquiry would be a possibility if collective action were to be carried out based on arguments from opposing reactions. Since the difference in number between those who would want to inquire and those that would not prefer the option was not much, open argument or dialogue in the process of decision making could lead to some reconsideration that might lead to the abandonment of the idea of making inquiries. This data also showed the unlikelihood that the citizens would collectively chose to curse them bitterly since an overwhelming majority (68.2%), more than twice the opposing number of responses (31.8%), did not favour this option. Other options seemed more realistic in this case. Some (55.2%) would go to the extent of confronting the local government administrators, fighting them physically (42.1%), and taking to community grievance demonstration (53.0%). The foregoing reactions even stretched to lying at ambush to hurt or kill the local government administrators (34.1%). A significant percentage of the respondents (38.5%) will even arrange to steal their local governments’ administrators’ money or property, or challenge the local government administrators in the court of law (50.6%). Like in the preceding argument, these foregoing indicated reactions had equal chances of either occurring as group or as individual actions. However, they were more likely to occur as individual reactions. This was because, the difference between the percentages of those in support of each of the actions cannot be largely differentiated from those that would want to take the opposite actions, and as in the foregoing explanation, the opposite of the actions were very likely to occur.

Finally, majority of the respondents (76.3%) preferred to react by not voting for the local government administrators in subsequent elections. The difference between the percentage of those in support of this choice of citizens’ reaction and those who were not was much, with those in support being more than double of those who were in opposition to it. Therefore, it was most likely that, on group action basis, the citizens would react to local governments’ mismanagement of funds for development by not voting for those local government administrators in subsequent elections. At individual level, however, those who favour other choices of action can decide to act otherwise. Finally, the possibility that some individuals or subgroups might want to combine more than one of the reactions stated before is very feasible.

Summary and Conclusion

This research work understudied 13 local governments in Imo State with the intention of surveying the citizens’ reaction over misuse or mismanagement or embezzlement of funds meant for the local government’s development.

Applying the social survey design, using the validated, reliable, and structured questionnaire, the research discovered that: Numerous dangerous actions against the local government administrators would be taken by the citizenry if the local governments mismanaged the accruing revenues so much as to be unable to provide needed infrastructures for the citizenry's development. Some of these actions may be as severe as physically attacking and killing the local government administrators and their family members, as well as refusal to vote for them in subsequent elections. It does not a million people to kill somebody.

Recommendations

From the findings, the following recommendations have become necessary.

Local government administrators should be transparent and visible in their management of local government finances otherwise, the citizens might feel slighted and be encouraged to act against the local governments' efforts in local government development. There may also be civil disobedience. Incomes and expenditures of local governments should be publicised, it is public fund.

The federal and state governments should set up monitoring teams to ensure effective use of funds allocated to the local governments and have a way of punishing offenders.

As of compulsion, every local government should make available, for public consumption, the finances that accrue to it and its plans on their utilization since this transparency helps in minimizing corruption. The federal government should pass a law making it compulsory for the local governments to make their activities and plans known to their people.

The local governments should use the allocated funds to provide needed infrastructures for the citizenry's empowerment and eventual development to avoid drastic actions as severe as physically attacking and killing the local government administrators and their family members, as well as refusal to vote for them in subsequent elections.

The government should set up a Complaint Committee where the citizens can easily come to lay complaint on issues between them and the local governments. This will help to nib from the bud grievances that could escalate and result into killing.

This research was an integrated one for 13 local governments in Imo State; individual local governments could be investigated to see if the effect will be the same.

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APPENDIX

Determining Age Bracket to Survey

S/N	ORGANIZATION	AGE GROUP	PERCENTAGE
1	UN Nigeria Census 2050 Proj.	0 – 14 Years	44
		15 – 64	53
		64 and above	3.1
2	CIA From World Factbook 2011 Nigerian Pop. Estimate	0 – 14 Years	40.9
		15 – 64	55.9
		65 and above	3.1
3	International Database – Nigeria 2011	0 – 14 Years	41
		15 – 64	56
		65 and above	3
4	Us Census Bureau Nig. Pop. Estimate	0 – 14	41.5
		15 – 64	55.5
		65 and above	3.1

The average age of the age range from 15 – 64 from these four groups sampled was approximately 55. Ages 15 – 18 which was included in this 55% group was very unlikely to be used because in Nigeria (and even in Developed countries) they are regarded as children and should be in school or learning a handiwork as apprentices. They should not be working to earn a living. The likely employment age of Nigerians would be age 20. There was no age grouping range that started from age 20 therefore Professors J. F. Adedun from Computer Science and Mathematics Department, and S. A. Adebola of Management Sciences all of Babcock University (see *Professors Adedun and Adebola* in Appendix 8) gave the mathematical and statistical solutions to arrive at 50% of the population as those between the range of 20 – 64 years that was used in the research (instead of 55% which included ages 15 – 19).

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