

Repositioning Nigerian Local Governments For Better Performance: What Potential Does The E-Government Option Hold?

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Abstract: *Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are increasingly being incorporated into the internal workings of government, globally. This is done in pursuit of a more effective, efficient and responsive machinery of governance. This paper assesses the potentials of e-government to overcoming the challenges that inhibit Ofu local government in Kogi State (North- Central, Nigeria). It sets out in specific terms to assess Ofu local government's performance, investigate core challenges that impede performance, assess the extent to which e-government tools are used in its internal workings as well as what potential threats exist that could supplant its adoption. The results show that Ofu local government's performance with regards to capital projects, speed in service delivery, transparency and accountability among others, are very poor. Though there are proven research and empirical evidences to the capacity of ICTs to reform and reposition public bureaucracies for better performance, there are a number of potential threats to its adoption in Ofu local government. This study identifies some of these impediments like; low computer literacy, lack of political will, lack of adequate ICT infrastructures, excessive bureaucracy, among others. The paper therefore recommends that government should invest in the provision of ICT infrastructures, as well as in purposeful ICT training. Furthermore, concerted efforts should be made to improve power supply, since electricity is the live-wire of ICT. Besides, transparency and accountability structures like freedom of information (FOI) should be activated and empowered, in order to equip the common man with the vital information needed to demand accountability from the custodians of public wealth*

Keywords: *Local government, e-government, local government performance, local government reforms, Information and communication technologies (ICTs)*

I. Introduction

The last three decades have witnessed unprecedented global transformation occasioned by a chain of innovations and paradigm shifts like liberalization, privatization etc, with enhanced Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) serving as the major catalysing factor.

The transformation that evolved as a consequence has radically changed the way things are done in almost every sphere of life and particularly in the complex mix and responsibilities of modern governance [1]. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as it stands today, is fast redefining the requirements for success and the attainment of set goals. It clearly poses new challenges to government with regards to increased speed, cost – effectiveness, convenience, availability, accountability/transparency etc and since services are the public face of government, they need not just be readily available, but also effective, efficient, cost – effective and sustainable.

The bureaucratic set up of government, makes performance (as defined by modern global demand and expectation) very challenging if not impossible. It therefore follows that traditional public administration may stand no chance of keeping up with the pace of global transformation and public demands/expectations unless it integrates and applies the tools of information and communication technologies into its system and operation. It is in keeping with this line of thought that [2] observes that almost all governments in the world have embraced one form of e – government or another [3]. It is however of the opinion that a majority of African countries are just beginning to understand the importance of such a concept in governance. Hence, a very poor e – government ranking. Nigeria has an e –government index ranking of 0.243 as against the world average of 0.414, meaning it is yet to be positioned to harness the limitless opportunities available in e – government to reinvent governance at all levels.

Nigeria is a federation of 36 states grouped under six geo-political zones, with 774 local government areas, a population estimated at 148 million [4]. A land mass of about 923,768 square kilometres, huge oil and gas reserves as well as commercial deposits of solid minerals of international demands. These potentials

notwithstanding, about 70% of the population are classified as poor while about 54.4%, are absolutely poor and live below the global US\$1 benchmark, with life expectancy flirting between 45 and 47 years. These less than desirable indicators suggest a huge performance lapse on the side of government at all levels; but then, since about 70% of the population live in the rural areas [3], the local governments have huge responsibilities to bring development closer to the people and by implication engender the much needed socio-economic turn around Nigeria desires. Nigerian local governments are however known to be symbols of non performance, corruption, slow administrative processes, incompetent workforce, lack of/resistance to innovations etc [5].

This study explores the huge potentials of ICT to reform governmental processes at the local government level and attempt a domestication of e-government tools in an effort to overcome the bane of local government performance in Nigeria. Similarly, it investigates the core challenge that could pose a threat to e-government in Nigeria local government.

Ofu local government which is the focus of this study is administratively divided into six departments with both political and administrative heads and a number of civil servants in the employ of the local government. This notwithstanding, administrative processes are observably very slow and quite inefficient; information retrieval is very cumbersome, if not impossible and so actions on such data is delayed, internally generated revenue is simply laughable. The implication of these administrative lapses are that, the constitutional mandate of the local government is left undelivered thereby deepening poverty and exacerbating public outcry and loss of confidence in government, with its attendant consequences. The situation becomes even more disturbing, when placed side-by-side the huge financial receipts it gets from the Federation Account. The Ofu Local Government Legislative Council puts the figure at over 1.2 billion naira, in 2010.

Giving the huge proven potentials available in ICT-enabled e-government to reform government bureaucracies, enhance information retrieval, improve inter/intra departmental communication, reduce waste, reduce cost of service delivery while making government more responsive to public demand [6], the not too impressive performance in the administrative processes of Ofu local government may find an explanation in the extent to which it has adopted the various tools available in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). This study therefore would be guided by the following research questions.

II. Conceptual Clarifications

2.1 The Concept of E-government

E-government, as describe by the World Bank, is the use of ICT to transform government by making it more accessible, effective, and accountable to its citizenry [7]. E-government involves the utilization of technologies such as the internet, to improve the services functions, and processes of governance[8].it involves more than establishing a Web server and hosting government sites [9]. However, the internet plays a vital role in establishing e-government initiatives [10]. The World Bank [7] provides a guideline for developing countries regarding e-government initiative. The body asserts that e-government initiatives should target the following:

Promote civic engagement by enabling the public to interact with government officials and vice versa, promote accountable and transparent government s in which the opportunities for corruption are reduced, provide a greater access to government information and activities. Provide development opportunities, especially the sorts that benefit rural and traditional underserved communities. Likewise, the United Nations Division for public Economics and Public Administration and the American Society of Administration [11] state, "E-government is about opportunity... to provide cost effective services to the private sector... to enhance governance through improved access to accurate information and transparent, responsive, and democratic institutions." Furthermore, e-government can be an emerging mode; involving both the citizenry and the state, where the importance of citizen input in policy formulation and implementation is recognized and valued [12]. [13] contend that the main objectives of e-government should include the following:

(i) Restructuring administrative functions and processes; (ii) reducing and overcoming barriers to coordination and cooperation within the public administration; and (iii) the monitoring of government performance. Others view e-government as a sort of public service that operates in a "one-stop, non-stop" manner [14]. Heeks[15] describes e-government as integrated governance, which enables the integration of both the processing of information by people and the use of communication technologies in achieving the objectives of governance. Importantly, there are several models of e-government. Bose [16] classified the types in to four broad citizen-centred groups. The first one is the government-to-citizen (G2C) service delivery that involves the building of web pages for one-stop services for citizens. Second, there is the government-to-business (G2B) model wherein governments cater to te needs of business/organizations. Third, there is the government-to government (G2G) model that facilitates inter-government functioning. For example, data resources can be shared and integrated by the different government arms; i.e., federal, state and local. Fourth, there is Intra-government services, which can also be describe as the government-to-employee (G2E). This model focuses on improving the internal efficiency and effectiveness of government operations by reducing redundancies. According to UNESCO (2004), e-government is the public sector's use of information and communication

technologies with the aim of improving information and service delivery, more accountable, transparent and effective.

2.2 Rationale for e-government in Nigeria

A culture of corruption and inefficiency is pervasive among functionaries in the country [18]. The Nigerian civil services was established to be non-partisan [5] and to run government services in the country, but the Nigerian civil services is partisan, inefficient and corrupt [19]. Some Ministers and Heads of Services have been dismissed for bribing member of the legislature [20]. Nigerian officials have colluded with multinationals to defraud the state [21]. With such deep-seated corruption taking place in the country, business and citizens bear the brunt of poor government services. For example, procuring an ordinary government form can be a difficult task in Nigeria because of requests for gratification from government functionaries. In an attempt to reduce bureaucracy, inefficiency, and corruption in the country the federal government of Nigeria is attempting to take governance (at least, the provision of some government services) online. In a speech delivered at the first Stakeholders Conference on National e-government Strategies Implementation for Nigeria, the Nigerian President said “it will no longer be business as usual” [22]. Further that the emphasis, style and programmes of this administration have always centred on reorientation of civil servants and public offers towards a change in the ways of doing government business in a transparent efficient and effective manner. This was to be done through the eradication of corruption and enhancing efficiency and productivity through a synergy of private and public sector participations and services delivery. We have taken major steps, namely, privatization, deregulation and monetization towards accomplishing the goal of a compact, accountable and productive government. There is no going back to the old ways. However, the backroom engine, which will run good governance through due diligence, due process and transparency, actually needs to be formally strengthened and institutionalized for wide spread effectiveness’ through computer assisted modern processes now commonly known as e-government” [22]

2.3. Impediments to e-government in Nigeria

The reports of notable bodies such as the [23], [24], [2] and [25] have described the barriers to ICT use in developing societies. These reports identified three broad categories of factors believed to be hampering the efforts of developing in making the most of ICT products for social and economic development and transformations: first, infrastructural problems, i.e. poor information and telecommunication technologies facilities. Second, institutional problems and third, human capital problems. For example, [2] listed poverty, low levels of literacy, lack of adequate infrastructure, high cost of ICT services, lack of investments, poor institutional structures, absence of international cooperation, and lack of security (in that order) as barriers to achieving the information society for developing countries.

2.3.1 Institutional Issues

Organizational problems effective communication and organizational skills are needed to maintain the vision, values, and aspirations of all stakeholders in an e-government [26]. This calls the role of government functionaries in Nigeria in to question. Would they be sincere in implementing and managing the values of e-government properly? DO they understand the prerequisite for e-government? Will these functionaries not use ICTs for their own ends? The reality is that government agencies and officials in developing countries might perceive e-government as a potential threat to their power and viability, and as such, may show reluctant in promoting the objectives of e-government [27]. Heeks [27] recounts examples where e-government efforts in Africa totally or partially failed due to “people” factors. Due to lack of organization skills or commitment, Nigeria has previously witnessed failure with committees mandated with national ICT policies; in fact, one body is formed and then disband for another [6]. Prior to NITDA (Nigerian IT Development Agency), the current body that administers the national ICT policy in Nigeria [28]; there was CCC (Central Computer Committee) in the 1970s as well as several other agencies with similar mandates. Even after the formation of NITDA in 2001, the former head of the body openly expressed disappointment in 2003, asking why the national ICT Bill had not been passed in to law [1].

2.3.2. Human Resource Challenges

The economic is dire for both the country and its population. Nigeria is poor and indebted [29]. The Nigerian government might not have the resources to implement e-government services because many of the resources have been diverted to issues such as reducing poverty and the servicing of foreign loans [30]. Nigeria is a large country, with approximately 60% of the populace living in rural areas [31]. Illiteracy is rife- it is at about 40% of the population [32] and secondary education enrolment is low [33]. In addition to the generally low literacy level in the country, Nigeria also lacks qualified I.T. professionals [34]. This might hamper e-government efforts, as skilled hands needed to develop such services are not readily available. Nigerian

universities do not graduate enough skilled IT professionals to match its current ICT needs [6]. Oyebisi and Agboola [35] assert that the highest enrolment in the University for Science and Technology in Nigeria between 1991 and 1998 per 1000 inhabitants was 0.31, with only 0.05 per 1000 students earning a postgraduate degree during the same period.

2.3.3 Problems of Infrastructure

As with the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria's internet access is poor [36]. There are about 3 million internet users in a country of 148 million inhabitants – this is less than 1% of the population! Access to the internet is crucial for e-government services, but is of little help with insufficient bandwidth. Only recently did a few countries in Africa procure bandwidths greater than 10 million bps .

Previously, many countries in Africa had bandwidths between 64,000 bps and 256,000 bps due to high international tariffs and lack of circuit capacity in the region [37]. The investments – local and foreign – in such facilities are low on the African continent [36]. The cost of a PC in Nigeria is six times the monthly wage of an average worker. The cost of subscribing to a telephone line or owning one is beyond the reach of an average citizen.

2.4. Local Government

[38]. While trying to arrive at a definite theory of Local Government examined some theoretical efforts already documented within the parameters of Local Government studies are related to the functional and institutional relevance of Local Governments in the politics of the world especially in Nigeria. They reviewed the works of such scholars like Ola (1984) and Gboyega [39] noted that the first class attempts to justify the existence or need for local government on the basis of its being essential to a democratic regime or for practical administrative purposes like responsiveness, accountability and control. The other class of theories is contrapuntal to the first class of theories. This is in the sense that it argues that an effective Local Government system contradicts the purposes of a democratic regime. Conclusively, all the positions summed to three schools of thought:

- (a) Democratic – participatory school
- (b) The efficiency – service school
- (c) The developmental school.

One could see that none of the three schools of thought is irrelevant to performance. Theoretically speaking therefore, Local Government is expected to enhance achievement of democratic ideals, political participation, protective services and infrastructural services like provision and maintenance of health facilities and intuitions. To this end, one can ask what is Local Government? There are an avalanche of definitions given by various schools of thought about the concept. The Nigerian 1976 Local Government Reforms as enshrined in the 1979, 1989 and 1999 conditions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria defined Local Government as: "Government at the Local level ... established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas (and) to initiate and direct provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their area [40]. The United Nations Organization defines Local Governments 'As a political sub-division of a nation or in a federal system, a state which is constituted by law and has substantial control over the unit or local affairs including the power to impose taxes or to extract labour for prescribed purposes". In addition the International Encyclopedia of social sciences [41], defines Local Government as "A political sub-division of National or Regional Government which performs functions which nearly in all cases receive its legal power from the National regional government but possess some degree of discretion on the making of decisions and which normally has some taxing powers.

In Nigeria however, the functions and responsibilities of Local Government is contained in Fourth schedule of the 1999 constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and some of these functions that are of relevance to health services are as thus. Section 7(1) C specified the establishment and maintenance of cemeteries burial ground and homes for the destitute or infirm.

- Establishment, maintenance and regulation of slaughter houses, slaughter slabs, markets, motor parks and public conveniences;
- Provision and maintenance of public conveniences, sewage and refuse disposal.
- Registration of all births, deaths.
- Control and regulation of movement and keeping of pets of all description, restaurants bakeries and other places of sale of food to the public.

The definitions above bring out four key characteristics of local government. First, local government officials are elected. Regular elections at specified period of time are a feature of local government. In fact, the main distinguishing characteristic that differentiates a local government from a local administration is the fact that while the officials of the former are elected those of the later are appointees of the centre to implement policies of the centre.

Second, the local government unit must have a legal personality distinct from the State and Federal Governments. Thirdly, the local government must have specified powers to perform a range of functions and finally, it must enjoy substantial autonomy. Local government autonomy means that the local government is elected at the local level and operate independently of the state and Federal Government. The local government is no longer an appendage or field office of the State government. The characteristics of local government autonomy include among other things ability to make its own laws, rules and regulations; formulate, execute and evaluate its own plans and the right to recruits, promote, develop and discipline its own staff.

Scholars and practitioners of local government over the years have been confronted with the question of the desirability or otherwise of local government. Various arguments have been advanced for the need for local government. It has been argued that local people will understand the problems confronting them more than other people and will be in better position to address the problems [42]. In addition, it is well established that people are prone to resisting impositions from above. Local government therefore provides opportunity for people to determine who should govern them at the local level.

2.4.1. Local Government Reforms in Nigeria

The history of Local Government system in Nigeria dates back to the colonial days. Although contact with Europeans dates back to the fifteenth century, it was not until 1861 before the first steps were taken to establish an administration by Britain. The colonial administration that was established was based on indirect rule. This requires that the administration should be carried out through traditional rulers and institutions. This led to the establishment of native authorities in their most rudimentary forms from the 1890s to the 1930s. The main function of the native authorities was to maintain law and order.

The first native authority ordinance recognized traditional rulers as native authorities. This was easily done in Northern Nigeria but there was a problem in identifying who those authorities were in southern Nigeria. This necessitated the first reforms in the 1930s and the 1940s culminating in the establishment of chief-in-council is made up to the chief and members of council. The chief presides at all meetings and acts in accordance with the majority of opinion in the council. But if he disagrees with the council, he would take whatever action he thought best and inform the Governor of the region. Contrarily, in the Chief-and-Council, the chief has no power to act against the decision or advice of the council. Under this arrangement, people particularly representatives of missionaries and British trading interest were appointed into the native authorities. The process of appointment of nominated members by the colonial government meant that nationalists were not appointed to serve on the councils. This led to further agitation for reforms in the native authorities. In the years 1950-55, the first largely elected local government council based on the British Whitehall model emerged in Lagos and the former Eastern and Western regions. Traditional rulers constituted not more than 25 percent of most council in the then western region and Lagos. However, in Northern Nigeria, the changes were more gradual. The legal framework for local government at this period was provided by the Eastern region local government ordinance of 1950, the Western region local government law of 1952 and the 1954 Native authority law in Northern Nigeria. By this time, the councils were given a wider range of functions including primary education, health, police, and judiciary. This is in line with the implementation of the colonial government's ten-year welfare and development plan (1945-1956). The councils also enjoyed a great measure of autonomy in financial, personnel and general administrative matters. It can therefore be said that the 1950s was the era of pupil age for councils in modern local government throughout Nigeria.

Between 1960 and 1966, there was a decline in the prestige and responsibilities of local authorities. In the former West 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 high rate of default in the payment of property rate including government institution, which reduces the revenue of local councils. The situation in Eastern Nigeria was similar to the West before the outbreak of the civil war in 1967. In Northern Nigeria, there were gradual changes in the structure of the councils with increasing numbers of elected or appointed non-traditional office holders becoming members of local authorities. The result was that the local authorities had a stable administration, which enabled them to assume responsibility, with some degree of success for more complex services like primary education. Between 1969/71, some state government introduced some changes in the structure of their councils. In 1976, the Federal Government in collaboration with the state government embarked on extensive reforms of local government. The objectives of the reform were outlined as follows:

1. To make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by devolving or delegating them to local representative bodies.
2. To facilitate the exercise of democratic self-government close to the grass roots of our society and to encourage initiative and leadership potential.
3. Mobilization of human material resources, through the involvement of members of the public in their local development, and

4. To provide a two-way channel of communication between local communities and government (both State and Federal).

For the first time in the history of local government in Nigeria, a uniform system was developed for whole country. According to the then Chief of Staff Brigadier Shehu M. Yar Adu-a in his forward to the Guidelines for Local Government Reform (1976): In embarking on these reforms, the Federal Military Government was essentially motivated by the necessity to stabilize and rationalize Government was essentially motivated by the necessity to stabilize and rationalize Government at the local level. This must be necessity entail the decentralization of some significant functions of state governments to local levels in order to harness local resources for rapid development.

Unlike previous reform measures, which were highly restricted in scope and range, the 1976 reforms conceptualized local government as the third tier of government operating within a common institutional framework with defined function and responsibilities. As the third tier of government, the local government gets statutory grants from Federal and state governments and is expected to serve as agent of development especially in rural areas. According to the 1976 reform, 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. Following the reform, the Federal Government in 1977, allocated 5 percent of federally collected revenue to local government.

The intentions of the 1976 reform were debated by the constitution drafting committee and the Constituent assembly in 1978. The result is that the 1979 constitution reaffirmed the development function as provide for in section 7, subsection 3.

It shall be the duty of a local government council within the state to participate in economic planning and development of the area referred to in subsection (2) of this section and to this end an economic planning board shall be established by a law enacted by the House of assembly of the State.

2.5 ICT as a tool for Reforming Bureaucracy:

The first theme that emerges is that IT (Information Technology) can and should be used as a tool for reforming the ills of modern bureaucratic organizations. According to this view, IT can be a driver and enabler of change and reform due to its boundary challenging nature, and governments can be reengineered and reinvented via IT to serve society better. This view holds that the key features of Weberian bureaucracy, i.e. hierarchy, division of labour and rigidity of rules have led to a situation in bureaucratic organizations where processes are 'stove piped' (i.e. highly inflexible) and information is held in 'silos' (i.e. not shared properly); this has resulted in government bureaucracies being inflexible and unresponsive to the needs of citizens. This theme upholds that ICT can foster improvements in collaborations and information sharing within government bureaucracies, and can thus make government flexible, responsive and efficient.

A report from OECD found that availability of technology was a driver as well as an enabler of change by making certain types of government functions more feasible and creating new expectations from them. The report claimed that "e-government can be a major contributor to reform" and that "ICTs (information and communication technologies) have underpinned reforms in many areas" [43]. Various researchers and policy analysts are also optimistic or convinced about the potential of e-government to reform bureaucracy. For example, the head of a public policy think tank avers [44]: "I see electronic government as being a more collaborative style of government, featuring: More collaboration with external sectors in making policy and in delivering services: More collaboration with citizens more collaboration within and among governments, domestic and international more collaboration within the workplace" Bellamy & Taylor [45] justify such views, that government can be reinvented via technology, on the basis of the 'boundary challenging' nature of information technology; i.e., IT enables new information flows that challenge pat norms and capabilities. [46] Propose the e-government initiatives can allow public administration to transcend its traditional hierarchical structures of accountability. Fountain [47] writes that "Information technology in conjunction with the redesign of organizational process flows has diminished the amount of red tape and accelerated the delivery of government services for some members of the public", and in our final illustration, Okot-Uma [48] posits, "Electronic Government (e-governance) offers an opportunity for governments to re-invent themselves, get closer to citizenry and forge closer alliances and partnerships with diverse communities of interest, practice, expertise, conviction and inter-dependence within the context of national development agendas".

2.6 Brief Historical Background of Ofu Local Government Area

Ofu local government was initially created by the Shehu Shagari administration on 2nd December 1980. It was however scrapped by General Mohamadu Buhari's administration in 1983, but was again created on the 11th May, 1989 when the military government of president Ibrahim Babangida created six additional local governments in the then Benue State.

Ofu local government at creation had only three gazetted districts. In June 1991 however, seven additional districts were created to bring the total number of district to ten. They include; Ugwolawo, Igalogba, Itobe, Ojokogbe, Aloji, Ejule, Ogbonicha, Igo, Omache and Ofoke districts. The local government shares common boundries with Dekina local government to the north, Igalamela/Odolu local government to the south, Olamaboro to the south East and Ajaokuta to the west. It occupies a total land mass of about 8,747.5 square kilometers. The 2006 population census puts the local government’s population figure at 192,169.

The people are predominantly engaged in Agriculture with a sizeable proportion engaged in government employment and business. The major agricultural activities are; fishing and the cultivation of crops like; maize, millet, rice, cassava etc.

2.7 Local Government Performance in Ofu Local Government Area: A Situation Analysis

A cursory look at Ofu local government area may give credence to the worries of most scholars and practitioners of public administration. The educational sector is in such a bad shape that pupils still sit under trees and on wood-logs to take lessons (when and where teachers are available). In the 21st century, the few primary school building where available, are dilapidated and discouraging [49].

Health care centers are mostly inhabitable grossly under staffed and without basic drugs. Ofu local government’s laughable 58 poorly equipped/managed health centers, puts the ratio of health center to population at about 1:1300, which is totally unacceptable.

Besides, governmental processes and information retrieval is so slow and cumbersome in Ofu local government that action on some critical issues may be taken late, or not at all [49].

Table 2.1 below checks what Ofu local government has been doing with regards to capital project.

Table 2.1: Ofu Local Government’s Capital Project 2009 – Feb 2011

Planned	District	Level of implementation		
		Full	Partial	Not implemented
Grading of 6 Rural Feeder roads Rehabilitation of township stadium Purchasing of 3 graders Rehabilitation of LG secretariat	Ugwolawo	Rehabilitation of LG Secretariat	Purchase of one Grader	Grading of 6 Rural-Feeder Roads Rehabilitation of Township Stadium.
4 boreholes Rehabilitation of 2 Primary School	Itobe	-	-	All
Rehabilitation of 3 Primary Schools Supply Agro-inputs	Igalogba	-	-	All
Rehabilitation of 2 Primary school Rehabilitation of one Health Care Centre	Ojokogbe	-	Rehabilitation of one Primary School	Rehabilitation of one Health Care Centre
Rehabilitation of 2 Health Centres, grading of one road	Aloji	-	-	All
2 boreholes (Alla & Agojeju) Rehabilitation of 3 primary schools	Ejule	-	-	All
Rehabilitation of 2 Primary School. Rehabilitation of one boreholes	Ogbonicha	-	Rehabilitation of one Primary School	Rehabilitation of One borehole
Grading of two rural roads Rehabilitation of Health Centre	Igo	-	-	All
Development of Omache spring building of 2 Health	Omache	-	-	All

Centre				
Rehabilitation of 2 Primary School	Ofoke		Rehabilitation of one Primary School	Rehabilitation of one Health Centre
Rehabilitation of 1 Health Care Centre				

Source: Ofu local government legislative council (2010).

The statistics on table 2.1 is a report of gross non-performance as well as it is every inch alarming. The only fully implemented capital project is the rehabilitation of the local government secretariat in Ugwolawo district, while four districts had partial implementation. The rest districts had no capital projects implemented (whether partially or fully).

The local government's non-performance posture may be better appreciated when placed side-by-side, the financial resources at its disposal, as shown on Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2: Quarterly Breakdown of Federal Allocation to Ofu Local Government

Quarter	Source	Amount (₦)
January-April	Statutory allocation	200,684,623
	Vat	18,312,431
May-August	Statutory allocation	293,618,121
	Vat	21,111,293
September-December	Statutory allocation	285,734,621
	Vat	20,413,823
	Excess crude	410,538,116
Total		1,250,413,028

Source: Ofu local government legislative council (2011).

Ofu local government's performance with regards to capital projects is simply unacceptable especially that over N1.2 billion had entered its coffers within one calendar year. Besides, there is the need for a paradigm shift that equips the people with the capacity to demand accountability from those who serve as custodians of public wealth. Herein lays the efficacy of the e-government initiative.

III. Sample size and Technique

The total sample size for this study is made up of 61 respondents. This sample size was reached using judgment sampling technique.

For the purpose of adequate representation of all variable under study, sample sizes were selected from each stratum thus:

(I) Career Staff – 31 respondents, (ii) Stakeholders- 20 respondents (iii) Management Staff -6 respondents (iv) Political office holders- 4 respondents.

Each of this group of respondents was selected on the basis of their competence to speak on the subject matter of this research. Interviews were also conducted, especially to get the views of the political class and those of the people they lead. Besides, on the spot assessments of some of the projects was also conducted by way of personal observation.

IV. Analysis Of Data

Table 4.1. Availability and use of ICT Infrastructures like (Computers, Printers, Scanners, Tax Machine) in Ofu local government.

Option	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Excellent	-	-
Moderate	4	7
Poor	7	11.4
Very poor	50	82

Source: field survey 2011

Table 4.1 above indicates by 82% that the availability and use of ICTs in Ofu local government is very poor while 11.4% think it is poor but a slim 7% is of the opinion that ICT structures like computers, scanners, printer fax machines etc are available and in use in Ofu local government. Howbeit moderately. It is therefore clear that ICT infrastructures have not been effectively incorporated in to the internal workings of Ofu local government.

Table 4.2: Factors affecting Ofu Local Government's performance

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Lack of transparency and accountability	15	24.6
Corruption	21	34.4
Manual/slow administrative process	10	16.4
Lack of funds	1	1.6
Low employee morale	8	13.1
All of the above	7	11.4

Source: Field Survey 2011

Table 4.2 above show that 34.4% of respondents are of the opinion that the factor militating against the effective and efficient performance of Ofu Local Government is corruption. Indeed there are overwhelming evidence in Nigeria local government administration of how council officials cart away with funds meant for the local government. Hence, Ukiwo [50] is of the opinion that local government chairmanship has become one of the most attractive and lucrative positions in Nigeria. 24.6% of the respondents blame Ofu local government's inefficient performance on the lack of transparency and accountability. Interviews further revealed that some vital information which are necessary to equip the people to hold government to accountability, are covered, a lot of the activities of the local governments are covered up in some kinds of secrecy, and since evil thrives in darkness, corruption reigns, making the local government unable to perform its constructional mandate and duty. Furthermore, 16.4% of respondents attribute Ofu local government's poor performance to its manual/analog administrative processes which slows down government response to public needs, and encourages a culture of rent seeking, bribery and corruption in its everyday activities.

Table 4.3 challenges to adopting e-government in Ofu Local Government

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Lack of an ICT policy framework	4	6.5
Low level of computer literacy	11	18.0
Lack of ICT infrastructure	18	30.0
Lack of political Will	7	11.47
All of the above	21	34.42
None of the above	-	-

Source: Field Survey 2011

The table 4.3 above implies that 6.5% of respondents think that the absence of a definite ICT policy framework could impede its adoption in Ofu local government. This is because it takes a policy background that mandates the activities of government to be carries out using ICTs, for the adoption of e-government to succeed (Ojo, 1996). 18% of the respondents are of the opinion that low level of computer literacy is a major obstacle to the adoption of e-government in Ofu local government. It is worthy of note that human capacity is very important to e-government [2]. Table 4.4 below however rates Ofu local government employees very low, per computer literacy.

Table 4.4: Ofu local government's Staff computer literacy rating

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentages
Excellency literacy	-	-
Literate	-	-
Fairly literate	5	8.2
Not literate	56	92

Source: Field survey 2011

With 92% of respondent, not computer literate, Ofu local government may still have a major challenge with regards to adopting e-government. Table 3.7 indicates that 30% of respondents think the lack of ICT infrastructure may impede the adoption of e-government in Ofu local government.

Table 4.5: Ofu local government's performance rating (per of social services like road, school, water supply and security)

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Excellent	-	-
Good	-	-
Fair	1	0.2
Poor	4	7
Very poor	56	92

Field Survey 2011

Table 4.5 above indicates that Ofu local government has performed very poorly, with regards to the provision of key social service like roads, schools, health care, among others. No respondent rates the local government's perform as either excellent or good. One respondents (0.2%) thinks the local government has performed fairly, four respondent (7%) rates the local government as having performed poorly, but incredibly, fifty six respondents (92%) think the local government has perform very poorly. This position is perhaps reinforced by table 2.1, that earlier on indicated that between 2009 and February 2011 only one capital project was fully completed, while four, were partially completed. Six out of Ofu local governments ten district have not had a single capital project executed or being executed as at February 2011. These among others, led to a public outcry for which the council chairman was suspended for some months in 2010.

Table 4.6: Ofu local government's performance (per prompt and adequate payment of salaries and wages)

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Excellent	-	-
Good	-	-
Fair	5	8.2
Poor	6	9.8
Very poor	82	92

Field Survey, 2011

Table 4.6 above further explains the performance status of Ofu local government as 50 respondents 82% are of the opinion that the local government's performance per payments of salaries and wages of staff is very poor. Interviews with members of staff revealed that between September 2009 and January 2011 (with a few exceptions) Ofu local government employers were paid one quarter of their basic salaries, without allowances. It is not surprising therefore that only 8.2% and 9.8% of respondents rate the local government performance with regards to salaries and wages as fair and poor, respectively.

This rather disturbing statistics becomes even more mind bogging as the Ofu legislative council puts federal allocation to Ofu local government figures at about #1.2 billion in 2010.

Table 4.7: Ofu local government's performance (per speed and administrative efficiency)

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Satisfactory	-	-
Fairly Satisfactory	13	21.3
Unsatisfactory	48	78.7
Undecided	-	-

Source: field survey 2011

Table 4.7 rates Ofu local government's administrative speed and efficiency as fairly satisfactory by 21.3% of respondents but as unsatisfactory by an alarming 78.7% of respondents. Interviews with some respondents revealed that files (on some critical issues) could take many months to move from one table to another (that is if it doesn't get lost in transit). This makes a lot of projects and programmes of government to stagnate, while making information retrieved in the local government almost impossible. This rather cumbersome and snail-slow administrative process prevents the government from maintaining an accurate data base on the felt needs of the people; and as a consequence, it becomes ineffective and inefficient.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The key findings of this paper are discussed below

- (a) Ofu local government has performed very poorly with regards to the provision of key social services, payment of salaries and wages, speed and efficient among others. Tables 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7, suggest a very low performance profile on every indices under investigation.
- (b) Ofu local government's performance does not in any way justify the huge financial resources that it has had access to from the Federation Account. Table 2.2 gives a breakdown of quarterly allocation to Ofu local government and leaves the total figure at about #1.2billion. (c) Factors responsible for Ofu local government's poor performance are: corruption (34.4%), lack of transparency and accountability (24.6%), manual/slow administrative processes (16.4%), low employee moral (13.1%) and lack of funds which got the lowest support from respondents (1.6%). 11.4% of the respondents however feel that not just one, but all these factors impede performance in Ofu local government.

- (d) The e-government paradigm has tools that can check the factors responsible for Ofu local government's poor performance. The internet, networked computers, radio and television can be used by government to make information available to the public and thereby ensuring accountability.
- (e) Administrative sluggishness and excessive bureaucracy may be checked by the use of e-mails within the local government so that officials who must respond to correspondences can do such on the even when not in office.
- (f) The possible impediments to the adoption of e-government in Ofu local government is indicated on table 4.3. There include; the lack of an ICT policy framework; 6.5% of respondents support this item, low computer literacy which is supported by 18% of the respondents is further proved by table 4.4.3. It is made clear that 92% of the respondents are not computer literate. This indeed is a huge challenge.

V. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in the believe that they have the potentials to engender a positive turn-around in Ofu local government and indeed, the Nigeria local government system.

- i) Agencies charged with oversight responsibilities on local governments like the Local Government Service Commission, the State Houses of Assembly etc should carry out periodic empirical studies on the performance of local government with the active participation of the people.
- ii) Ofu local government and indeed local governments in Nigeria should invest in purposeful ICT training and the development of its staff. A phased transition from the traditional, analog and highly bureaucratic administrative system that encourages corruption and rent seeking, should be embarked upon, with the federal government setting time limits and deadlines.
- iii) Power supply has continued to be a very serious limiting factor in Nigeria. Critical to e-government is very good electricity supply. Government at all levels must therefore make the generation and distribution of electricity a core priority, if e-government and its enormous capacity would benefit Nigeria local governments.
- iv) The lack of political will, mostly exhibited by public officials toward e-government, is a good number of times, the result of ignorance. Agencies like the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the Nigeria IT Development Agency (NITDA) should organize regular workshops to enlighten public officials, especially at the local level on the advantages of ICTs in government.

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