



The auditor-general for local governments' and accountability in local government administration in rivers state, 2007-2018

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Abstract

Nigeria is considered as a frantically corrupt country because of the absence of transparency and accountability in governance. The cry for accountability in both public and private sectors in the country has become ubiquitous. Accountability is a key factor of entrenching good governance. For the Local Government System, the situation is terrifying. This underscores the essence of this study which focuses on the role played by the Auditor-General for Local Governments' (AGLG) in entrenching accountability in the Local Government system in Rivers State from 2007 – 2018. The study aims at interrogating the following: (i) if the AGLG enjoy independence in executing his functions in Rivers State; (ii) the degree to which the AGLG could contribute to accountability in local government administration in Rivers State; and (iii) strategic challenges that hinders the AGLG from enhancing accountability in local government administration in Rivers State. The theoretical framework of analysis adopted for this study is functional theory. The study revealed amongst others that the AGLG does not enjoy independence in the execution of his functions and recommends that there should be proper funding of the office of AGLG amongst others as a panacea for attainment of fiscal discipline in the Local Government Councils in Rivers State.

Keywords: accountability, audit, auditor- general, corruption, local, government, Rivers State

Introduction

Public sector in Nigeria is an encapsulation of the Local, State and Federal governments and all government commissions and enterprises (Seddi, 2005) ^[34]. Without doubt, the State sector occupies a substantial place in the advancement of the economy of a country. The services that the public sector delivers are very enormous in size and accounts for the nonpublic sector to attempt venturing into. To bear the load of the public sector, every resources belonging to the State is managed by the government which is accountable to the people. Thus, the individuals that run government must manage the affairs of the state transparently with impeccable character that directs their affairs. Chan asserts that, this is achievable through a conflation of desirable individualistic qualities, achievements, characteristic conduct, and a stern control structure (in Dauda & Kumaniok, 2015, p.15).

To ensure transparency and frugality in governance, the Chief Olusegun Obasanjo led Federal Government of Nigeria conceived and saw to the birth of Commissions saddled with the job of monitoring the deeds of persons holding public offices in order to guarantee willingness to account for their actions while in governance. Hence, the administration established the Independent Corruption Practices Commission (ICPC) and the sister agency, the Economic and Financial Crime Commissions (EFCC) in 2001 and 2004 respectively (Dauda & Kumaniok, 2015, p.15). Basically, ICPC is tailored to expel corruption in public life by examining reported cases and prosecute those who practice corruption over and above educating and enlightening the populace on and against corruption; whereas the essence of EFCC is to sanitize Nigeria of economic and financial related crimes and also play role in the fight to choke money laundering and terrorists financing from

within the Nigerian society (Wikipedia, 2019). The war against corruption in Nigeria is critical in achieving accountability, which is a potent lead to good governance.

Accountability in the public service is the trademark of modern democratic regime. When those occupying public positions are not giving or willing account for their activisms and omissions, for their decisions, policies and their expenditures, then democracy remains a paper procedure. This assertion is true because accountability in governance is, unarguably, a primary element of democracy (Coke, 1998) ^[12]. This is critical is the governance of every tier of government.

Public accountability according to Smith and Hague as cited in (Ajie, 2014, p.156) ^[16] has a definite connotation in the regulation of State finance. Public accountability as measure for financial control demands that government institutions have the assurance that funds are expended in tune with specified purpose devoid of immoderate personal gains to any private individual, outrageous compensation for the services they rendered. On this backdrop, scholars call it financial accountability.

Oshisami cited in Appah & Bariweni (2013) ^[8], asserts that, often, the thirst for accountability originate with a curious chase for rectitude, virtuousness and probity on the part of public administrators. Nowadays, governance particularly the government at the local level which ought to drive down the attention and advantages of the government to its grassroot populace have witnessed an unimagined setback due to unseemly usage of government funds. This habit has crept into the local governments to the point that funds allocated for development concerns of the councils are diverted into pockets of individuals. Be that is it may, there is hope that the height of obscurity and unaccountability in the local governments can be reduced

minimally through a functional audit of the accounts owned by the local governments. As noted by Adeniji, (2004) ^[3], Appah (2008) ^[8] and Akinbuli (2010) ^[7] the proper accounting and fiscal reporting system assist companies, businesses and societies to apportion her wealth and revenue in a potent manner. This calls for frugality and fiscal discipline of the managers of the resources of the State who are held accountable for their deeds in office. Nwaorgu (2003) ^[27] and Johnson (2004) ^[21] hold that ‘auditors in the public sector guaranty that funds have been spent in line with the terms and conditions by which such monies were appropriated and that accounts have been duly prepared.’ Also contributing to the discourse, Akinbuli (2010) ^[7] observes that ‘accounting as a rule governing conduct or activity that came into being due to the concept of stewardship and stewardship accounting. Stewardship is likened to the practice whereby fruitful resources owned by an individual or members of a larger group are left to be controlled by another individual or group of individuals.’ Being that the functionality of that organization lies in hands of individuals other than the owners, the owners therefore would seek to know how the organization is faring periodically. In this sense, managers should give thorough narrative or report of their activities to their employers (Okezie, 2008; Atu and Atu, 2010) ^[29]. Usman and Ogada (2010) argue that usually, the account provided and made available by the managers’ as compared to recompense on investment to guide stakeholders to judge capableness of the management. Nonetheless, the interested parties can adopt the narrative of an independent auditor to appraise the feat of management. Auditors report on financial records triggers an echelon of confidence provided such reports tread on the heels of widely accepted accounting principles (Whittington and Pany, 2004). To decide the fate of the financial record and to provide a clear and well-grounded visualization of the establishment’s financial situation and activities for a particular duration being audited, it is appropriate for the auditor to gather all the proof incumbent to score the organization’s process of intramural control patterns and also examine records, observe assets, make findings both internally and outside the consortium and by other auditing processes.

The International Standard on Auditing (2009) maintains that the essence of financial statement audit is to empower the auditor to give clear opinion, financial statements whether they are set in agreement with a pinpoint frame of reference on financial reporting. These perspectives serve to authenticate the feat and conduct of agents concerning adherence to their principals in their absence. Such a steward is duty bound to put forward his financial report for dissection by an unrestrained and unbiased auditor to establish the true and fair description of the account so presented. As Usman and Ogbada (2010) ^[35] contend, auditors act as guard against illegality and are therefore looked up to view and give their professional opinions on statements on financial matters and make report the statements not minding if the consortium’s financial performance is fairly highlighted. Officials in the local government arrangement carry out their duties in the absence of the people, therefore it is not out of proportion to report their actions and inactions to them in order to maintain the support of the citizenry in obtaining of inescapable resources. Following this, it is common secret that persons holding public offices in Nigeria are recalcitrant to report their actions to the masses. Hence, on this warp and woof this study is set out to look

carefully at the AGLG as agent of public financial accountability in local government administration in Rivers State, from 2007 - 2018.

Theoretical Framework

A meaningful research process commences with explaining the meaning of the concept, model or framework which directs the study. The researcher often does not only gather facts, classify them but must ascertain a correlation and sequential order among them. In achieving this, the researcher ought to be guided by some tested theories that is concerned with the true situation of the social phenomena under study (Egobueze, 2017) ^[15]. Consequently, the theoretical framework adopted for this study is the “Functional Theory”. The Functional Theory is largely associated with sociological scholars such as Emile Durkheim, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Talcot Parsons and Robert Merton, etc. Similarly, Ekpenyong (2003:40) ^[16] presents the basic assumptions of Functional Theory as follows:

1. Every society is relatively stable structure of elements;
2. Every society is a well-integrated structure of elements;
3. Every element in a given society has a certain function, that is, renders a benefaction to its persistence as a system; and,
4. Every functioning social structure is based on a consensus of value among its members

(Iheanacho, 2007, p.80; Okorodu, 2007, p.133 and Iwaremie-Jaja, 2004) ^[20].

Bailey (1982, p.478) states that:

Functionalism assumes that particular variable or explained phenomenon is partly a larger system... also, it explains the basic existence of a certain phenomenon by discovering what function it has for the larger system it is part of. The basic tenet of functionalism is that phenomenon subsists in the system only because, and only if they’re needed and perform a useful function.

In political science analysis, the Functional Theory is mainly associated with Gabriel Almond (Nwaorgu, 2002, p.147) ^[27]; Ntete-Nna, 2004, p.141) ^[25]. In fact, aside from the clear fact that structural-functionalism gained more acceptance as a mode of analysis in political science since the 1950s, Almond and Powell (1966) introduced a structural-functionalist approach to comparative politics/politicking in the nineteen-seventies. They opined that in understanding the true nature of political system, it is worthwhile to understand its institutions or structures, in addition to their respective functions, (Mahajan, 1998).

Almond, in looking at structural-functional approach as a macro variant of analysis identified seven input and output functions of a political system. Whereas the input functions include political socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation and political communication; the output or governmental functions are rule (law) making, rule application (laws enforcement through administration, public policies and decisions) and rule adjudication. Basically, rule application (laws enforcement through administration, public policies and decisions) is in consonant with audit processes and proceedings. It stresses the duty and function of the Auditor-General to implement by determining or deciding claims of financial expenditures and the guilt or innocence of local government handlers.

In-line with the scholarly views above, it is undoubtedly factual that the Functional Theory stress that every system: social, economic, legal, judicial/political, etc, has structures and these are expected to perform some certain functions, duties, and responsibilities to make sure system equilibrium or homeostasis and advancement. It is consequently in consideration of these that the choosing of the Functional Theory is made as the most qualified and applicable theoretical framework of analysis for this worthwhile study, which incidentally verges on the Auditor-General for Local Governments, being an executive arm in the political development of Nigeria.

Without any scintilla of contradiction, the Auditor-General constitutionally is a major structure of achieving accountability in Nigeria's political system. It performs certain functions as defined in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Government of Nigeria (As Amended), the Financial Regulations and the Rivers State Local Government Law No. 5 of 2018, for the purpose of public transparency, accountability, and development of Nigerian political system.

Conceptual Clarification of Terms

Accountability

Adegite (2010) defines accountability as the obligation to demonstrate that work has been carried out in consonance with agreed rules and standards, with the officer reporting fairly and accurately on performance result vis-à-vis mandated roles and plans. It means doing things transparently to conform to due process and feedback provision. Many social relationships carry a constituent part of accountability within. Accountability is all about being answerable to people who have invested their trust, faith, and resources to you. Johnson (2004)^[21] posits that public accountability is a vital component for the up and running of our political system, as accountability means that whosoever is charged with drafting and/or carrying out policy should be obliged to give an account of their actions to their electorate. Premchand (1999)^[31] opines that the quest to achieve full accountability has been and continues to be inadequate, partly because of the design of accountability itself and simply because of the widening range of objectives and associated expectations therein attached to accountability. Furthermore, he argued that if full accountability is to be achieved, together with its constructive aspects, then it must be carefully designed. The objective of accountability should go beyond the naming and shaming of officials, or the pursuit of dishonest behaviour, to a search for durable improvements in economics management to minimize the occurrence of institutional recidivism.

Audit

Awe (2008) explains auditing to be 'an independent examination of the books and accounts of an organization by a duly appointed individual to enable that person give an opinion as to whether the accounts give a true and fair view and comply with relevant statutory guidelines.' The American Accounting Association (1971) in its Statement of Basic Auditing Concepts in Hayes *et al.* (1999) describes auditing as: 'a systematic process of objectively obtaining and evaluating evidence regarding assertions about economic actions and events to ascertain the degree of correspondence between these assertions and established criteria and communicating the results to interested users'. Audit is an investigation of the financial statement of the

organization as to attest to the credibility of the financial report. Thus, the primary objective of an audit under Company and Allied Matter Act (CAMA) 1990, is for an appointed auditor to express his professional judgment on the financial capacity of an enterprise as contained in the financial statement prepared by the management so that any person reading and using them can have faith in them that they may not contain errors; that they may not disclose misleading; that they do not fail to agree or correspond to regulations; and have not failed to uncover relevant information (Nwachuku:2010, p. 2).

Auditor-General for Local Governments (AGLG)

The office of the AGLG is a creation of the Local Government Law of each State and the function of the office is as determined by the enabling law and related audit laws. The office is solely responsible for auditing all accounts of the 23 Local Government, 23 Local Government Education Authority, Local Government Pension Board and Local Government Service Commission in the State and submits its reports to the State House of Assembly and the Governor (KSG, 2016). This office is created by Section 114 and 115 of the Rivers State Local Government Law No. 5 of 2018 and ensures transparency, accountability and value for money Audit. The Public Accounts Committee and the Office of the AGLG together direct function of the external control in the financial administrative process of local government operations.

Local Government

Egobueze (2017)^[25] states that Local Government is a political authority created by law at the community level to provide services of local nature to the area for which it is created. Agagu (1997) asserts that local government is a government at the grassroots level of administration, meant for meeting peculiar needs of the people. In his analysis, he viewed local government as a stage of government which is ought to have its greatest impact on the grassroots populace. Aransi (2000) opines that local government is a governmental administrative unit closest to the people, or in general parlance, the grassroots. Local government according to him acts as veritable agent of local service delivery, mobilizer of community-based human and material resources, and organizers of local initiatives in responding to a wide variety of local needs and aspirations, it provides the basic structures and conditions for grassroots participation in democratic process.

The Auditor-General for Local Governments and Accountability

There is a common believe that good governance stands on four pillars: accountability, transparency, predictability and participation (ADB 2001). Accountability in other words is the capacity to hold public office with the mindset of taking full responsibility of any outcome resulting from actions taken. Transparency means there is a certain level of accessibility to applicable information. Predictability emanate primarily from clear laws and regulations, known in advance, and evenly and effectively enforced (ADB, 2001). Importantly, public participation is required to provide authentic information and to scrutinize local government action. These four components cannot stand independently. They are all instrumental to the achievement qualitative local government management.

The four pillars of good governance are necessary for fiscal discipline in local government administration. However, in the **Local Government system, the factors that inhibit accountability are numerous due to corruption. Critically, there is**

- **The lack of predictability** of local government financial resource commonly serves to neglect strategic prioritization, making it hard for officials to plan for the services to render.
- **Transparency** is essential for public office holders and the general public because it engenders direction to good governance. However, when it comes to local government financial information, the officers handle such information in secrecy and near lack of lucidity.
- **Appropriate participation** means the involvement of the citizens in local communities; namely, the None Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), public officials, workers, and relevant stakeholders in governance. This is achieved through public education and enlightenment programmes and town hall meeting wherein the public officers let the people know what the government is doing and elicit from them inputs on their local needs and how to fast track development in the area. This gives direction to the government of the people as enunciated by Abraham Lincoln when he captured democracy from as the ‘government of the people by the people and for the people.’
- **Accountability** which is questionability and answerability is needed for the scrutiny of the utilization of local government revenue and expenditure results.

Although the four pillars of governance are interrelated, but accountability rests on the shoulder of good local government practices. Through excessive use, the term accountability has earned a number of different qualities and meaning. Effective accountability has two major fundamental components (ADB 2001):

1. **Answerability** – is a necessity for local public officials to give feedback from time to time to concerns relating to how they exercise their authority, how the resources are spent, and the achievements recorded therein.
2. **Consequences** – this explains the need for reasonable penalty for acts committed by public officers that manage the resources of the State, especially Local Government Councils that lack fiscal discipline in public financial management and brazenly and primitively enrich themselves families and cronies from the common wealth.

It is imperative to make local government accountability more effective to enhance problem solving plans for better decentralization and for the managerial autonomy of local government. This can be achieved through effective checks and balances. The guarantors of this are the Local Government Legislative Councils, the AGLG, and the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Assembly of State which the AGLG reports to. The strengthening of these offices to be efficient is critical for entrenching accountability in local government administration.

In a functional government structure, a local government in all ramifications is subject to accountability give account to the

citizens, on whom sovereignty rest. This type of accountability includes:

- **Bottom-up** - local government being accountable to people in locals;
- **Horizontal accountability** - local government being accountable to public institutions; and,
- **Vertical accountability** – local government being accountable to state and federal governments.

The study of accountability in local government has been a topical issue in Nigeria’s democratic experience and this has led to the various wall-blocks against local government financial autonomy in Nigeria. The perception that local government administrators and managers are frantically corrupt have gained great currency in social discourses, their profligacy in the management of public funds and primitive accumulation have been subject of various debates in various forums and this is a serious threat to efficiency in governance at that tier of administration and re-kindled vociferous calls for proper auditing of the Councils in order to keep the managers in check with their core mandate of grassroot development. The imperative of the office of the AGLG is therefore a *sini –qua-non* for good governance at local level.

To achieve good fiscal regime in Local governance, the following are vital for the Auditor-General for Local Government.

Extant rules and the independence of the Auditor-General for Local Governments

Independence is a state of freedom from internal or external control, especially in the exercise of an assignment. It means the avoidance of being overly influenced by a vested interest and to being free from any control that would prevent a correct course of action being taken. Independence connotes a value that can be possessed by individuals to say no to captivity of thought, ideas and be able to make an uncontaminated decision on a given issue without externality of influence. For the office of the AGLA, independence is critical for effective scrutiny of public accounts. This is germane in engendering accountability in local government administration in Rivers State.

In recent times, there has been great increase in figure and monetary value of activities in the public sector. This calls for frugality and fiscal discipline of actors that handle and manage public funds. Auditing is “one essential element of accountability” (Aikins, 2011), and “all echelons of governments have the task of ensuring that appropriate audits are executed and reports therefrom acted upon” (Public Sector Auditing Standards, 1997). More so, ‘the pursuit for accountability has caused demands for farther facts about Public sector schemes, projects and services...’ Both lawmakers and the citizenry should know whether government resources are handled in compliances with laws. They should also know whether public sector organizations’ programmes, services and projects operate economically, efficiently and effectively in accomplishing their stated objectives. The above factors provide justification for the auditing and inquest into the third tier of government in Nigeria, given the debilitating corruption that has been associated with that stratum of governance by the AGLG. However, to perform such duties effectively, the AGLG should enjoy independence. Nonetheless, the AGLG can depute some of his officers to represent him perform his functions and that person shall be

accorded the unhindered permission to all reports, books, records, documents, returns and other documents relating to those accounts.

The key instruments that set the parameter and guarantee the functionality of the office of the AGLG are: the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (As Amended), Audit Act of 1956, the Financial Control and Management Act of 1958, the Rivers State Local Government Law No. 5 of 2018 and Financial Regulations of 1999, The Rivers State Local Government Law No. 5 of 2018 gives the AGLG some latitude of authority, thus, Sections 114 (7) and (8) as well as 15 state as follows:

14. The accounts kept by a Local Government Council in accordance with the requirements of this Law or any other enactment in force in the State shall, in accordance with the Audit Law, be subject to audit by the Auditor General for Local Governments.

15. (7) For the purpose of this Section, the Auditor General or any person authorized by him shall have access to every book, record, return stored digitally or electronically and other documents relating to the accounts of the Local Government concerned.

(8) The Auditor General shall have power to:

(a) periodically conduct Value For Money (VFM) Audit for the purpose of ensuring effective, efficient and economic utilization of the resources of the Local Government; and

(b) investigate or act on every audit query drawn to his attention for the purposes of safe guarding the resources and assets of the Council or prevention of losses incidental.

Similarly, Section 102 of the Financial Regulations gives vent to the AGLG to scrutinize and ascertain ways that he feels suitable in his judgment with regards to the following:

- The accounts are kept in good condition;
- All public/council monies have been completely accounted for, in tune with set standardized rules and procedures;
- Monies disbursed are truly expended for the exact purpose they were authorized; and
- Very basic records are maintained to insure the application of best practices to control and safeguard both public funds and properties.

Section 103 of the Financial Regulations gives the AGLG free access to all files, safes, plus other records of all MDAs /Councils. The AGLG is also entitled to require and receive from members of the public services such as information, reports and explanations as they may deem necessary for the proper performance of his duties. Section 125(2) further gives the AGLG or any person he authorizes to have unhindered access to all records and books.

Despite constitutional provisions to preserve the independence of the AGLG on paper, the sad reality is that the AGLG does not enjoy full independence. The AGLG seeks for validation from other authorities, beyond seeking for approval or receiving order from political office holders in discharging his duties, the office is not very well funded to undertake the vagaries of activities that it is saddled with. This has made accountability very difficult. According to Premchand (1999) ^[31], 'the capacity to achieve complete accountability has been and continues to be deficient, partially on account of the fashion of accountability itself and partially by reason of the vast scope of strategic and associated prospects attached to accountability'.

Auditors are required to express opinions on financial statements in both private and public sectors. Through these opinions, they not only dictate frauds, but also contribute to accountability in governance. Both public and nonpublic sector auditing have some dissimilarities and one amongst others is in the public expectation on the work of the public auditor which includes detecting and reporting frauds. For this purpose, Section 103 of the Financial Regulations also gives the AGLG free access to books, documents, files and safes, etc of all MDAs/Councils. Likewise, he reserves the right to ask for and receive information, reports and explanations from handlers of the public services to further to help the progress of his

Nwachuku, (2010: 12) asserts that, in order for the AGLG to perform his duties effectively; certain Codes of Ethics are required. First, he should possess an independent mental attitude, integrity and be objective in his approach to his work. He opined again that, "the auditor ought to be fair and shouldn't admit prejudice or bias to becloud his objectivity. The auditor should possess the technical competence to performance the audit - this includes being new-fangled with technological evolution in his field; he must, always, show evidence that an audit was carried out - this implies that he must have working papers as evidence of his effectiveness; he must plan his audit properly and performance the audit". Additionally, Nwachuku (2010:12) posit that, equipped with these personal attributes the report which the auditor will render must be timely, unambiguous, and harmony with the law and auditing standards. Following this, the study looked into the hurdles that impede the auditor when discharging his duties.

Challenges that confront the Auditor General in the discharge of his functions

The basic challenges that impede the AGLG in the exercise of his function are as follows:

1. **Inadequate funding:** Section 116 of the Rivers State Local Government Law No. 5 of 2018 provides that: 'every local government shall contribute 3% of its revenue accruing from the Federation Account to the purse of the AGLG to make it possible for it to perform the purpose and activity for which it exists and the funds must be from source'. While this proviso is appreciated for ensuring independent funding of the AGLG's, however, the fund is inadequate to conveniently execute its functions and also train workers on modern professional skills.
2. **Lack of enforcement powers:** The AGLG lacks the ability to enforce recommendations arising from his reports as such powers only resides with the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the State House of Assembly. Most times, political affiliations determine who becomes a member of the committee. Owing to this, House members that possess a background to meaningfully contribute towards tackling problems raised by the AGLG in his report are sometimes not considered for appointment into the committee. Consequently, Okaro & Okafor (2011) observed that "some of those members accused by the report of the AGLG are most often immune and go unpunished". The concern on intentional delay that accompanies submission of reports mentioned earlier only succeed in making some audit queries become unoriginal and redundant before they get to the PAC. Although not proven, Maimako (2005) hints that some

lawmakers take to compromise in discharging the highly important task of auditing. Wherefore, the committee which is the stronghold of reliance for the taxpayer performs below expectation. The remedy to this deficiency is that appointments into this vitally important committee must be exceptionally reserved for competent members of the State House of Assembly with track record of indisputable character and decency in the management of public office.

3. **Lack of disciplinary powers against erring local workers:** Often, public functionaries have expressed little or zero respect for the AGLG. They practically ignore providing reply to the query for facts by the AGLG and when they do, it is usually not promptly. This, no doubt, is not completely but mostly credited to the handicap disposition of the AGLG to discipline and/or sanction political officers and civil servants in the management of local government.
4. **Political interference:** The AGLG most often is influenced by top members of the ruling cabal to suspend or stop an auditing process that affects their member. This is common in most states within this clime and negates considerably his independence as guaranteed by extant rules. The effects of this are rooms are created favoritism in audit reporting and recommendations.
5. **Poor record storage/keeping:** Poor record-keeping is also a contributing factor to negative audit results. Resolving the most audit outcomes is not a complex issue, but requires dedicated cadres of officer and committed leadership. Poor record keeping can result in a business exhausting the budget, leading to spending more than earning. As a result of this, the AGLG contend with delays or inability to make available records, which disclaimer opinions.
6. **Executive Capacity:** Effective public service audit requires competent, incredibly skilled, highly qualified and well-motivated manpower. At the moment, this is inadequate in the Rivers State public employment and therefore, 'adversely affects both the treasury and audit functions' (Salawu & Agbeja, 2007). Others factors are the dearth of computers and Information Technology (IT) knowledge. Most staff of the Local Government Councils and the office of the AGLG are unskilled in the usage of computer, and this affects overall performance. Also, the salary structure in the Nigerian public service is not enticing and this affects proficiency and effectiveness. The nonpublic sector, promptly and without difficulty, absorbs such highly trained manpower and motivates them to incredible achievement (Okaro & Okafor, 2011).

Conclusion

Local Government Councils in Rivers State in particular and Nigeria at large remain unconvinced of the relative worth of the office of the Auditor General for Local Government because of the latency of the office. The experience of these Local Governments Councils with AGLG operations within the length of time covered by the study undoubtedly influences their perception about the imperatives of the office of AGLG in war against corruption which is achieved through auditing. Good auditing is a catalytic to good governance which is almost elusive at the third tier of governance in Rivers State. The need to re-invent the office of the Auditor-General for Local Governments to be more productive in the scrutiny of public funds is a task that

should be achieved. This however cannot be achieved without substantive interaction between the various local governments, Local Government Service Commission, and Auditor-General for Local Governments.' Good knowledge of local government operations will improve the definition of audit scope. To combat this operational challenge will require concerted efforts from all and sundry in order to entrench fiscal discipline and accountability in grassroot governance in Rivers State.

Recommendations

The most potent power of any institution is financial independence. No organization can survive without good funding and for the office saddled with the scrutiny of public funds, it needs adequate funding in order to exercise full independence. The Rivers State Local Government Law, 2018 guarantees that each Local Government Council in the State contributes 0.3% of its funds from the Federation Account down from source to service the office of the Auditor General for Local Government. This effort is commendable, but suffices it to say that the amount is inadequate to provide for the sundry activities of the office of the AGLG in order to guarantee its independence; consequently, it is recommended that the amount be increase to 1%. This would enhance better funding and check corruption of the Staff of the office.

The State should restructure to establish an Audit Commission which would provide for administrative independence of the Staff of the AGLG. This Commission should inherit the current Staff of the office from the Local Government Service Commission and ensure that they the Commission take care of the remuneration, welfare and discipline of the staff of the Office of the AGLG. Furthermore, given that effective audit in the public service requires well-motivated manpower, the system of reward of the AGLG ought to be improved. Staffs in the audit department of the public service should be remunerated like their peers in the private establishment. This will guarantee their independence rather that serve as an appendage for any department in the council.

In view of the fact that public service audit requires competent, highly qualified and skilled manpower, the office of the Auditor-General for Local Governments should draw up and religiously apply a basic course of study in local government operations for all staff involved in local government auditing.

This study found that poor record storage/keeping poses a great hindrance to smooth operations of the AGLG; the study therefore recommends that Local Government Councils should migrate from pen and paper to information and communication technology (ITC) to keep financial reports/records. This will save time spent on sorting for papers and also prevent documents from physical harm.

Having identified political interference, lack of enforcement powers and disciplinary powers as challenges that impede the AGLG, it is incumbent to recommend that the Rivers state local government law No. 5 of 2018 and subsequently the 1999 Constitution should be amended to ensure that the Auditor-General for Local Governments' is empowered to prosecute, sanction, discipline and query erring public officers involved in corruption at the local government level in order to bring about best audit practice.

Local government exist in a dynamic environment, as such, the study deems it apposite to recommend that the professional

opinion of researchers in the area of audit should be sort to discuss the findings of their survey reports as well as recommendations before undertaking on administrative or legislative amendments of the report of the Auditor-General for Local Governments for consideration in a bid to improve on the effectiveness and efficiency of the AGLG.

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