

**ROLES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHAIRMAN IN  
CURBING SOCIAL VICES AMONG RURAL YOUTHS IN  
AKWA IBOM STATE**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper investigated the roles of local government chairmen in curbing social vices among rural youths in Akwa Ibom State. Local government chairmen are seen as the nearest government to the people and, thus, a channel through which the community feels the pulse of other higher levels of government. Therefore, the roles that local government chairmen play in curbing social vices were also identified in this paper. However, this paper identified social vices as bad traits, unhealthy and negative behaviors that are against the morality of a society and frowned upon by its members. Some of these vices were reviewed but are not limited to: bribery and corruption, cultism, sexual promiscuity, and drug abuse. Therefore, the conclusion is that the roles played by local government chairmen in curbing social vices are very significant due to the fact that the local communities possess various networks used in combating crimes. One of the recommendations made in this paper was that local government chairmen are seen as the third tier of government that is closest to the people. Thus, they should strive for a better and suitable management structure and skills for managing social vices.*

**KEYWORDS: Roles, Local Government Chairman, Social Vices, Rural Youths and Akwa Ibom State**

**INTRODUCTION**

In a democratic system of government, there are high expectations of the dividend of democracy. The needs of the people for personal security, social order, welfare, social services, and general prosperity are expected to be delivered as public goods by the government (Mukoro, 2005). Consequently, in order for these needs and public good to be met, governments and public servants, according to Vigoda (2006), have to work faithfully and diligently for the sake of society and its members in reducing the effects of social vices in our communities. It is important to note that it is almost impossible to meet the needs of the citizens without taking into consideration the interaction between public administration and its environment. This is because the environment, both internal and external defines to a large extent the structure and functioning of the administrative system, while the administrative system also has the capacity to modify its

environment or be modified. It is imperative to note that for these public good to have a significant impact on the effect of social vices on the lives of the people especially at the grassroots level, the invaluable role of local government chairman is indispensable. In this sense, the local government chairmen are expected to bring government closer to the people by facilitating effective and efficient service delivery and encourage political participation and the involvement of locals in the management of their affairs. Such provision of infrastructural development according to Agba, Akwara and Idu (2013) is expected to be executed in a satisfactory, timely, effective and adequate manner. Therefore, whatever is the system of government, local government chairmen being the third tier especially in a federal state like Nigeria has been essentially regarded by Oladimeji, Ajike & Nasiru (2016) as path to, and generator of national integration, administration and development.

## **CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

### **CONCEPT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHAIRMEN**

Local government chairmen are the third tier of government, which is closer to the people and also the channel through which the community feels the pulse of the other higher levels of government. As a concept and one of the subordinate units in the federal political system arrangement, it has attracted the definitions of various scholars. Therefore, there is not unanimous agreement among these scholars on the definition of local government chairmen. However, Appadorai (2006), quoted in Kyenge (2013), defined local government chairmen as one of the subordinates of government, popularly elected and charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular place or district. Awa (1981) in Fatile & Ejalonibu (2015) defined local government chairmen as a political authority set up by a nation or state as a subordinate authority for the purpose of dispersing or decentralizing political power. In the same vein, Odo (2014), citing Wraith (1984), defined local government as the act of decentralizing power, which may take the form of deconcentration or devolution. Deconcentration, he observes, involves delegation of authority to field units of the same department, and devolution, on the other hand, refers to a transfer of authority to local government units or special statutory bodies such as school boards. According to this viewpoint, local government has less power in the national polity. Similarly, Adebayo (2014) sees local government as the breaking down of a country into small units or localities for the purpose of administration in which the inhabitants of the different units or localities concerned play a direct and full part through their elected representatives who exercise power or undertake functions under the general authority of the national government. According to Kyenge (2013), local government is a political authority with the right to exercise political power, which means the right to take decisions that are binding on the people and to obtain compliance. In effect, local government is a creation of central government and is subordinate to central authority.

The aforementioned definitions by various scholars listed above clearly show that local government is a multi-dimensional concept. The dimensions are:

**Political Dimension:** Local government is seen as a political institution. It is basically a political mechanism for governance at the grassroot level.

**Legal Dimension:** Local government is a legal institution in the sense that it is established by law under the competent and higher authorities. This makes local government a miniature body-politic and a corporate body. In its former capacity, it is an agent of the state and, as such, represents the public interest. In that capacity, it exercises a part of the power of the state legally delegated to it within specified geographical boundaries (Ola and Tonwe, 2009).

**Geographic Dimension:** Local government also has a geographical dimension. From the perspective of a specific and defined territorial jurisdiction over a particular human habitation, the local government may be conceptualized in geographic terms. The geography of local government, which includes physical, demographic, and economic features, has an impact on its policies, administration, and law. These various features are of universal character and may therefore be conceptualized.

**Economic Dimension:** Local government is basically an economic institution with a primary role to play in promoting the economic well-being of the people of the locality. The economic dimension of the concept of local government relates to its economic viability. Thus, revenue generation becomes a primary function of local government. Ola and Tonwe (2009) explain that a local government that is not economically viable cannot do much to improve the economic conditions of the people in its locality.

**Administrative Dimension:** Local government has an administrative dimension. It has its own local bureaucracy, like other higher levels of government that coordinate the activities and the operation of the day-to-day running of the system. On the whole, it may be said that local government is basically an organized social entity based on the feeling of oneness. In political terms, it is concerned with the governance of a specific local area, constituting a political sub-division of a nation, state or other major political units. In the performance of its functions, it acts as an agent of the state. In other words, local government is an integral part of the political mechanism for governance in a country.

**Social Dimension:** From the social dimension, local government is basically a social institution. This emanates from the fact that man is a social animal and must, of necessity, interact with other people (Ola and Tonwe, 2009). Local government provides a platform for people in a locality to express and fulfill their human urge to interact, and in the process of interaction, the feeling of convergence brings to the fore the commonality of basic needs of the people in the neighborhood: food, shelter, clothing, water, etc. It is those facets of their feeling of oneness that are a binding force not only among themselves but also between the local authorities and the local people.

## **CONCEPT OF SOCIAL VICES**

Social vices are fast becoming national and global trends. Social vices cut across ethnic nationalities, races, and even religious cleavages. Some of the social vices include but are not limited to examination malpractice, indecent dressing, prostitution, political thuggery, cultism, drug addiction, targeted assassinations, armed robbery, pipe-line vandalism, vandalism of electricity installations, and cybercrimes (Apase & Yawe, 2019). These vices are at variance with social norms and values, which include beliefs, attitudes, honesty, hard work, customs and traditions, ideals, skills, and taboos, which a society cherishes and passes on from one generation

to another via formal and non-formal education. As the concept implies, social vices are bad traits, unhealthy and negative behaviors that are against the morality of a society and frowned upon by its members. And this has attracted the definitions of various scholars. However, Osarenren (2002) argued that social vices are behaviors that do not conform to the rules, regulations, norms, and values of any society and are viewed as deviant. Okwu (2006) stated that social vices arise from behaviors or maladjusted people in society. Mezieobi, Jerry-Alagbaoso, Nwosu, and Onyeagoro (2015) noted that social vices are misbehaviours, wrong attitudes, and unacceptable characteristics that have bedeviled the development of Nigeria. And these vices are illegal, null, and void in Nigerian society. These social vices are existent in both urban and rural parts of Nigeria and are perpetuated by both politicians, teachers, lecturers, students, educational leaders, religious leaders, policy makers, legislators, etc., who are all faulters of social vices. Some of the examples of social vices encountered in Akwa Ibom State are explained below.

***Bribery and Corruption:*** Bribery and corruption are two different concepts that cannot be separated because they go hand in hand (Mezieobi, et. al., 2015). These are the main social vices that have militated against Akwa Ibom State's development. Ngwube and Okoli (2013) posited that corruption is a cancer that has eaten deeply into the fabric of Nigeria's politics. According to Ezegbe (2004), bribery and corruption as social problems in Nigeria constitute a very topical issue now in the country. The general global perception about graft in Nigeria is that it is generally acknowledged that corrupt practices are endemic and systemic in both the public and private sectors of Nigeria. Ngwube and Okoli (2013) further concluded that bribery and corruption are the involvement in illegal, dishonest, or wicked behaviour that is destructive to the moral fabric of Nigerian society.

***Cultism:*** Cultism is one social vice that has bedeviled Nigerian society. As cited by Nwoke (2006), the Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology defines a cult anthropologically as a set of practices and beliefs of a group in relation to a local god. These activities relating to the local god are highly secretive as members always swear an oath of secrecy. Secret cults or societies are those organizations whose members completely conceal their rules, the names of their members, their signs, and passwords from outsiders. The members take an oath of secrecy and are often under the threat of severe punishment in the case of their violation. According to Ajayi and Ayodele (2002), the following reasons why people engage in cultism are: search for responsibility, search for satisfaction of one's aspirations and needs, search for security, search for social identity, etc.

***Sexual Promiscuity:*** Sexual promiscuity among Nigerian youths is another serious vice that calls for serious concern. Most youths who, for the first time, gain some social freedom from their parents' watchful eyes and guidance easily fall prey to the temptation of tasting the forbidden fruit. Some of them become so wild about illicit lovemaking that they give most of their time and attention to it. Sexual promiscuity could lead to an unwanted pregnancy, baby, or even premature death. In an attempt to get rid of an unwanted pregnancy, complications may result, which may lead to hospitalization.

***Drug Abuse:*** Drug abuse refers to the use, especially by self-administration, of any drug in a manner that deviates from an approved medical or social pattern within a given culture (Ogunade, 2002). Government agencies refer to any use of an illicit substance as drug abuse, e.g.

opioids, heroine, Indian hemp, etc. Generally, there are certain drugs that users, including youths, become easily addicted to and therefore abuse a lot. These are mostly (i) central nervous system stimulants (ii) central nervous system depressants (iii) hallucinogens (iv) narcotic analgesics (v) alcohol and (vi) tobacco. The causes of drug abuse among youths are not too different from those for adults. Bell (2009) noted that drug abuse has many causes: cultural, social, economic, psychological, and family pathology. These causes include drug abuse through ignorance; deliberateness, pleasure, curiosity, incorrect drug dosage, drug habits and addiction; home, school, or work environment; personal feeling of inadequacy; and membership of group/peer pressure. Although drugs have very important beneficial effects on man, when abused, they lead to a lot of undesirable consequences for the individual as well as for society. Some of the social effects of drug abuse on youths include wastage of money and resources, violent crimes such as fighting, rape, suicide, murder, etc., and physical and psychosomatic disorders or diseases.

### **THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHAIRMEN IN CURBING SOCIAL VICES**

Local government chairmen in Nigeria play a dominant role in the plan, organization, and delivery of curbing social vices in our society. In research conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology (2012), it was discovered that local government chairmen are the central agency of any nation in the development of local crime prevention and control plans, which recognize and prioritize anxieties about community safety and crime prevention and control in a local government area and recognize key action areas and responsibility for these activities. In a related development, UNODC (2015) at the 13th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice posited that governments are gradually associating with communities and civic society organizations to prevent crime and control it due to their information and experience of local crime issues and the ability to reach out to susceptible and vulnerable sections of society. In the contribution of Achu, Owan, Uyang, and Francis (2013), they submitted that local community chairmen play a very significant role in the prevention and control of social vice due to the fact that the local communities possess various networks used in combating crimes. Such networks include the councils of elders, village/district heads, chiefs, religious heads, etc., whose functions are to explain and impart the community's code of conduct and behavior to younger ones and pass it down from generation to generation.

According to Ellitt (2015), local crime prevention and control plans offer a valuable framework to better organize various creativities directed at the causes of social vices, enable improved collaboration and cooperation between main stakeholders, and ensure an all-inclusive approach to social vices. The report further argued that they are vital mechanisms for engaging the local community in plans and policies to address social vices and safety problems. The report supported its arguments with the following facts:

1. That, research has revealed that a great number of social vices are very local in nature, and there is an indication of the increased efficiency of crime prevention and control activities initiated at the local level.
2. Local government chairmen have the opportunity to manage social vice and control responses within the community using existing mechanisms such as community counseling processes.

3. Local government chairmen are the closest level of government and are reflective of the needs and aspirations of the people. So, there is a great expectation from the community that local government chairmen will shoulder some level of responsibility for directing or initiating plans for social problems that are seen to be affecting the community's safety.
4. That, local government chairmen often have the most suitable management substructure and skill base for conveying the multi-agency programs that are often required.

However, local government chairmen are important avenues through which plans and strategies for social vices are controlled and can be directed in order to achieve the desired results. Thus, the above view was concurred with by Achu et al. (2013) who disclosed that, although the local communities are not civilized when compared to urban societies, they have a well-reliable tradition for preventing and controlling vices and maintaining peace.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper reviewed the roles of local government chairmen in curbing social vices among rural youths in Akwa Ibom State and thus concluded that local government chairmen are the subordinates of government popularly elected and charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular place or district. Therefore, the roles of local government chairmen play in curbing social vices are very significant due to the fact that the local communities possess various networks used in combating crimes. However, the paper also identified social vices as behaviors that do not conform to the rules, regulations, norms, and values of any society and are viewed as deviant. And these vices are at variance with social norms and values, which include beliefs, attitudes, honesty, hard work, etc., which a society cherishes and passes on from one generation to the next.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Local government chairmen are seen as the third tier of government that are closer to the people. Thus, they should strive for a better and suitable management substructure and skill for managing of social vices.
2. Government in all tiers should organize forums that will enlighten the youths on the dangers associated with social vices.
3. Local government chairmen should promote integrated spatial and socio-economic development that is socially just and equal for entire people in the community in other to help reduce any form of social vice that may arise.
4. Local government chairmen should shoulder some level of responsibility against social vices and directing or initiating plans for social problems that are seen to be affecting the community safety.



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