

## Effective Strategies for the Improvement of Human and Material Resources Management in the Nigerian Local Government System

**ANYADIKE NKECHI. O**

Department of Public Administration and Local Government,  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka  
Email: [nkee4jesus@yahoo.com](mailto:nkee4jesus@yahoo.com)

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### *Abstract*

*In every area of organization, human and material resources play an indispensable role. Badly managed, the human and material resources of an organization can limit their progress in every direction. Well-managed human resources with well-managed material resources will precede successful and efficient local government system, hence resources management provides a systematic assessment, requisitioning and approval process for the evaluation and acquisition of products, equipment's, and resources, whose objective is to continually seek opportunities to reduce costs and improve performance through the cost-effective selection and standardization of products, equipment and related process while maintaining or improving the quality of care/services provided to the people.*

*Key Words: Local Government, Service Delivery, Human Resources, Material Resources, Management.*

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### **Introduction**

The need for improved service deliverance in the Nigerian local government system has necessitated the need for strategies to improve upon their human and material resources which will in turn, improve the Nigerian democracy, hence the assertion that the local government plays a crucial role in developing democratic regimes by establishing stable mechanisms for economic and social development in Nigeria is a truism and the level of the management capacity is a key element of its success. However, local government has been criticized as inefficient leading to scholars often, questioning its desirability. Fortunately, scholars have overwhelmingly advocated for an efficient democratic local government as a vehicle of socio-economic development in Nigeria; as it has been widely argued that local people understands their peculiar problems more and thus are better positioned to address them substantially. To achieve this noble task, it behooves on the local government to improve upon the human and material resources at their disposal. As a matter of necessity, the local government needs three main resources to survive. These are financial, material, and human resources. The local government needs money to pay her staff and to buy the essential materials or equipment for operation. Maximum production of services offered cannot be achieved unless the essential material resources are available. Of course, there is no organization without human resources. Even if an organization has got all the money and the materials it needs, it must still find capable people to put them into effective use. It is, therefore, safe to claim that human resources are about the most important of the three essential resources of an organization. It is equally true to say that human resources are the highest asset of any organization, because no matter the amount of capital invested in an organization, its success or failure depends on the quality of people who plan and execute its programmes (Nwankwo, 2000).

However, having identified the needed resources in the local government as an organization, there is also the need to develop capacities to allocate these resources efficiently. These capacities are management of financial resources that determines how money will be spent to get the work done, and accounting for these expenditures; management of material resources which obtains and sees to the appropriate use of equipment, facilities, and materials needed to do certain work; management of personnel resources which motivates, develops, and directs people as they work, identifies the best people for the job; and time management which manages one's own time and the time of others. Together, they are known as Resources Management (<http://www.onetonline.org/find/descriptor/browse/Skills/2.B.5>).

Nonetheless, the role expectation of the local government in the socio-economic cum political development of Nigeria, coupled with the erstwhile accusations of ineffectivity and inefficiency that has eroded the pride of local government administration in Nigeria has called for a need to step up their games in ensuring improved service delivery in the 774 local government posts in Nigeria. Such calls are to ensure that local needs and demands are met at their local levels so that the presence of the government is overwhelmingly felt at the local/grassroot levels. These calls are contingent upon a believe that local government services has been poor overtime; and therefore, this research seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What are the effective strategies for human and material resources management improvement that can guarantee enhanced service delivery in the Nigerian local government system?
2. What are the impacts of these strategies for human and material resources management improvement on the local government system in Nigeria?

In lieu of the above identified questions and the examination of the imperatives of human and material resources management in the Nigerian Local Government system towards local government service improvement in Nigeria, the paper seeks:

1. To identify the effectual strategies that will guarantee human and material resources management improvement which will in turn ensure enhanced service delivery in the Nigerian local government system.
2. To examine the impacts these strategies for human and material resources management improvement will have on the performance of Nigerian local government system

## **Human Resources Management in the Nigerian Local Government**

Leadership and management go hand in hand. Indeed, management is an essential instructional leadership tool. Yet, aspiring or new public officials are often led to believe that the logistical or management aspects of the job are of minor importance.

Human resources and its management are all about the people in the organization. In the local government parlance, you all seated here are the human resources of your local government. And we are of the opinion that your council can not fare better than you make it. Therefore, you- the people who make up your council are considered the most important resources. Hence people and how they are managed are becoming more important because many other sources of competitive success are less powerful than they used to. However, recognizing that the basis for competitive advantage for any local government council has changed is essential to developing a different frame of reference for considering issues of human and material resource management as strategic, because human resource management aims to ensure that your council obtains and retains the skilled, committed and well-motivated workforce it needs. This means taking steps to assess and satisfy future people needs and to enhance and develop their inherent capacities – their contributions, potential and employability – by providing learning and continuous development

opportunities. It involves the operation of recruitment and selection procedures, management development and training activities linked to the needs of the council alongside their motivation.

Accordingly, Armstrong (2009) defined Human Resources Management as a strategy, integrated and coherent approach to the employment, development and well-being of the people working in an organization. Boxall et al (2007) defined Human Resources Management as the management of work and people towards desired ends. Quest (1987) defined human resources management as comprising a set of policies designed to maximize organizational integration, employee commitment, flexibility and quality of work.

In Nigeria, general policies on the conditions of service of local government employees are made by the states and local government affairs department and the meeting of the key functionaries in charge of local government (Okoli, 2000). The interpretation and implementation of these conditions of service are left to the various local government service commissions and the directors of local government and heads of service in the various local governments where they exist. The relationships between the various bureaus for local government on the one hand, and the local government service commissions and the directors of local government and heads of service on the other are not clearly spelt out (Okoli, 1977). Moreover, the relationships between the executive chairmen of local governments and the personnel departments in their local government, as regards senior cadres of local government employees, are anything but obvious. Even in the case of junior cadres, the exact role relationships between the executive chairman and top member(s) of the personnel departments of the local government are not clear-cut.

In lieu of the above, the importance of human resources planning to organizations cannot be overemphasized, at least, it enables organizations to keep accurate and detailed personnel records, rather than forecast intuitively (Obi, 2002:53) the same applies to material management. It will also permit manpower planners to monitor the action rates in various departments of the local government. Such vital records/data can provide information for recruitment and hiring as well as clues about morale of employees. These information and clues could be useful to local government human resources planners. Also, adequate manpower planning is important because it will not only help organizations to use their manpower resources optimally but also to ensure that organization's manpower resources can meet up with the demands of the prevailing socio-economic, political and technological changes at all times. Finally, adequate manpower resources planning is very important in order to prevent severe budget crises, because, if this situation arises, the only option usually left for management is retrenchment of large number of employees, or induce voluntary retirement by offering financial incentives. Alternatively, management could freeze employment or combine all the alternatives highlighted above. It is, therefore, necessary to plan manpower resources in such a way to avoid all adverse consequences.

However, as it concerns the local government system in Nigeria specifically, effective human resources planning is necessary because it will assist the local governments in obtaining and retaining the quantity and quality of manpower needed for effective use; ensuring the optimal use of human resources currently employed, through training and career planning; avoiding waste by eliminating redundancies; providing for the future manpower needs of the organization in terms of needed skills, experience, locations, numbers, ages and sex; establishing and recognizing future job requirements; being better prepared to cope with the human problems associated with increases or decreases in manpower; enabling the local government commission to identify areas where a shortage or excess of manpower will likely occur in the future and to take advantage of the impending situation.

Therefore, the achievement of the purposes, aims, or objectives of the local government system depends to a large extent on the quality of personnel employed in it. According to a United Nation's publication, "lack of systematic personnel planning has in many cases given rise to duplication of work (UN, 1982:30).

## Material Resources Management in the Nigerian Local Government

Semantically, material resources management is a scientific technique, concerned with planning, organizing and control of flow of materials, from their initial purchase to destination. Material resources management is an important management tool that is very useful in getting the right quality & right quantity of supplies at right time, having good inventory control and adopting sound methods of condemnation and disposal will improve the efficiency of the organization and also make the working atmosphere healthy in any type of organization.

The local government workers must know the basics of material management so that they can get the best of the available resources and make it a habit to adopt the principles of material management in all their daily activities (Selvaraj, n.d). The aims of Material Resources Management are to get the right quality; right quantity of supplies at the right time, at the right place, for the right cost. The purpose of material management are to gain economy in purchasing, to satisfy the demand during period of replenishment, to carry reserve stock to avoid stock out, to stabilize fluctuations in consumption, to provide reasonable level of client services.

Its objectives are both primarily or secondarily categorized. The primary objectives are to ensure right price, high turnover, low procurement and storage cost, continuity of supply, consistency in quality, good supplier relations, development of personnel and good information system. The secondary objectives are to ensure forecasting, inter-departmental harmony, product improvement, standardization, new materials and products and favorable reciprocal relationships.

For an effective management and supervision contingent on managerial functions of planning, organizing, staffing, directing, controlling, reporting, and budgeting, the four basic needs of Material management - to have adequate materials on hand when needed; to pay the lowest possible prices, consistent with quality and value requirement for purchases materials; to minimize the inventory investment; and to operate efficiently prevails. The essence of improving on both human and material resources in the Nigerian local government is anchored on the postulation that the humans in the organization cannot perform better than the materials at their disposal for work. Therefore, the need to look at approaches to improve on both human and material resources becomes eminent.

### Methods

Principally, the secondary source of data sourcing method was utilized. Perceptively, books, journals, newspapers, internet materials, conference and workshop papers as well as government publications were consulted. Resultantly, the findings were analyzed with the content analysis approach. The aftermath of the exercise is the under listed approaches which were further explicated for effective internalization:

## Strategies for Improving Human Resources in the Nigerian Local Government System

### Adequate Workers' Motivation

Employee motivation, rewards and recognition system is not just a positive thing to do with people but communicating it effectively is an efficient tool in encouraging them to excel. Treating employees as valuable assets and maintaining harmonious relationships with them does not only guarantee efficiency in present but also is an effective strategy for future. Hence employers and management need to be pro-active in developing a talented and dedicated workforce that can achieve goals of their councils.

Fulfilling employees' needs, recognizing their efforts and presenting them with monetary and non-monetary rewards help you create a right workforce for your organization that can be your partner in success. Recognition of their efforts and boosting their morale results in increased productivity and decreased attrition rate. It is a proven fact that the motivated and dedicated workforce can change the fate of any council. After all, human effort is the biggest contributing factor in success of any organization. It is just next to impossible to achieve organizational goals only by the efforts of top management, because it is the workforce who executes their plans and helps them achieve their aims. But a combination of monetary and non-monetary rewards can work wonders and drive employees to perform well continuously. A proper and efficient employee reward and recognition program can establish harmonious relationships between employees and employer (<http://www.princetonreview.com/careers.aspx?cid=78>).

According to Isah (n.d) in every organization, employees work enthusiastically or with zeal and cooperate amongst themselves and with the leadership to achieve the laid down objectives. This is primarily due to the job satisfaction they derive in the conduct of their routine activities. The local government system, within the so-called three tiers of governmental structure in Nigeria, is the neglected step-child in the entire governmental arrangement. The nexus between motivation and employees in the local government has been a neglected theme of study in Nigeria. In most cases, the condition of employment in the local governments has always been taken as given within the prevailing orthodoxy of governance.

Whereas, the condition of employment in Nigerian local governments is not fundamentally different from other organizations in the country, there should be comprehensive, attractive and tempting conditions of service, staff regulations and scheme of service in the local government system that are adequately comparable with relevant organizations in Nigeria, like job security and absence of all forms of job hazards. This is with a view to making the employees of the local governments not only motivated but also satisfied with the work they do. More so, there should be workplace environmental requisites in the forms of social amenities in the local governments to relatively attract, retain and amuse the employees. In all, there should be transparent and transformational leadership in the local governments as a must strategy for employee motivation and achievement of objectives.

The drive stems from the facts imbedded in the assumption that social influences on motivation suggest that motivations are socially and culturally determined which leaders, even at the local government level, must not ignore because leadership and motivation are intrinsically connected with and dependent on each other (Isa, nd).

But the need for recognizing and motivating different people for different things should be stressed. Motivated local government employees will always be satisfied, happy and zealously ready to be engaged in any challenging task the organization places on them. Employees will therefore, strive to achieve such organizational objectives based on the degree of motivation categorized into physical, socio-economic and psychic dimensions (Kazmier, 1981:331).

### **Proper Utilization Of The 1% of Federal Allocations For Staff Training**

The importance of training employees cannot be over emphasized. Its benefits outstrip its cost. As a process, it enhances the skills, capabilities and knowledge of employees for doing a particular job; it moulds the thinking of employees and leads to quality performance of employees. Training is continuous and never ending in nature. It is crucial for organizational development and success. It is fruitful to both employers and employees of an organization, as employee will become more efficient and productive if he is trained well. Training improves morale of employees, leads to less supervision and fewer accidents; increase chances of promotion and ultimately increases productivity.

In lieu of the above, the federal government set aside 1 percent of the national budget for the development of the Nigerian local government workforce. The need to maximize this gesture by the federal government depends on the value attached to the proper management of the workforce of the Nigerian local government. Therefore we call for optimal utilization of this fund for the specific purpose of human resources management

### **Adequate Human Resources Inventory**

The rate of personnel audit in the local government existing side by side with ghost workers syndrome is a thing of concern because the actual number of local government employees, coming to the know, will help ensure effective management of the councils human and material resources. In fact, it is impossible to management without knowing who and how many of whom you are to manage. Personnel audit is a truism but we are of the opinion that there is a need to be proactive in human resources inventory to know exactly who to plan for, their needs and existing capabilities.

### **Proper Delineation of Functions/Offices**

In the local government councils in Nigeria, almost every employee wants to be in revenue drive. Many would not want to be in the works department. Many in the finance department will not want to leave office for a day. For this reason, many of them have turned down the offers for training because of the promises of their post in the office. Therefore, to get the best out of the workforce, well delineated function/offices for the employees is a most.

### **Engendering performance and diligence by career local council servants**

The career civil servants are supposed to take back their pride of place in the council as vibrant and progressive agent of change in the locality where they work. If the essence of the creation of the local government is to be achieved, they are not supposed to engage in show of power with the political appointees and elected officials because they will rule for a while and leave the council, but they career local government civil servants are always there. That is where their career is and so they should guide it with their life by being proactive in raising the status of the council, vis-à-vis being productive and ensuring efficiency of the local council. The political officers are to give them the enabling environment to work and survive.

### **Adequate Provision Of Administrative Offices**

There is this saying that in Nigerian local governments, some employees' offices are under the mango trees. More than necessary, it has been heard that for those staffs with offices, there are usually about five or six in one small office. This situation alone kills the morale of the workers and tarnishes the image of the council. Hence there is the urgent need to ensure adequate administrative blocks where the employees will work effectively and efficiently.

### **Effective Organizational Communication**

Effective communication is a basic prerequisite for the attainment of organizational goals. No organization, no group can exist without communication, not even the local government. Without effective communication, the management of human resources will be hampered. Even the co-ordination of work is impossible without effective communication and the organization will collapse for lack of communication. Hence co-operation also becomes impossible because people cannot communicate their needs and feelings to others.

Communication is the thread that holds the various interdependent parts of an organization together. When it stops, organization activity ceases to exist. An idea, however great it is, is useless until it is transmitted and understood by others. When communication is effective, it tends to encourage better performance and job satisfaction. People understand their jobs better and feel more involved in them. It is through effective communication that an executive ultimately gets work done by others. Therefore, a successful executive must know the art of communication.

Moreover, communication is a means whereby the employee can be properly motivated to execute company plans enthusiastically. It is the means by which behaviour is modified, change is effected and goals are achieved. The first executive function is to develop and maintain a system of effective communication-the tool for understanding. It is commonly said that what nerves are to human organism, communications are to an industrial system. Since management has been described as getting works done by people, it is necessary to communicate what the management wishes to accomplish by the various tasks which the organization has undertaken.

A successful executive should have the ability to receive, analyse and transmit information in motivating his subordinates in the right direction. Thus effective communication is a skill of management. In organization communication transmits orders for work, aids in doing the work, buying raw materials and in advertising and selling the product. It is the means used to hire, fire, promote, praise, urge, censure, persuade and so on. Communication plays a major role in dealing with employer employee relation problems, employee productivity, in short, with all human relations matters. Bad communication is often the root cause of many problems. Secrecy breeds rumours and a hush-hush attitude breeds harmful rumours (<http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/business-management/what-is-the-importance-of-effective-communication-in-an-organisations/2532/>)

### **Inculcation of ICT in Organizations**

Top contemporary leaders fully realize the power of information technology (IT) tools for reaching business targets. The utilization of Information Technology (IT) tools help not only to fulfill defined company's goals but to optimize the work processes as well. Trends and results of the contemporary studies constantly confirm contribution of the IT tools in Human Resources (HR) area i.e. to accomplish assigned HR tasks by using the source of IT capabilities (Gabčanová, n.d).

Thus, Information Technology plays a critical role in leveraging and complementing human and business resources (Powell and Dent-Micallef, 1997). The importance of using the Human Resources- Information Technology tools: in organizations, despite increasing needs for technological advancement, human and cultural factors play a more important role than before. However, technology is often seen by management as essential means to compete in the global market. To that technology, including information technology, brings the desired results, the most important issue for an organization is how to manage the technology with respect to human organizational aspects, how to analyze and understand human factors guided by the norms, shared beliefs, and assumptions of the organization, as well as by individuals' unique values-all together known as "culture, (Zakaria and Yusof, 2001).

According to Lewis (nd) Technology has changed the business world many times over. In the Information Age, the advent of computers and the Internet has increased that impact significantly. Many businesses cannot even function without the use of computer technology. This impact is seen in nearly all areas of business, including human resources, where technology continues to have a significant impact on HR practices.

Below are areas where Information Communication Technology has impacted on Human resources management are:

### **Recruiting**

One way in which human resources has been significantly impacted by technology is in the area of recruiting. Before the Internet, HR recruiters had to rely on print publications, such as newspapers, to post jobs and get prospects for open positions. Other methods such as networking also were used, but HR recruiters did not have the ability to post a job in one or more locations and have millions of people see it all at once. Technology has made recruiting more efficient and, in the hands of the right recruiter, more effective as well.

### **Training**

Information technology makes it possible for human resources professionals to train new staff members in a more efficient manner as well. The ability to access company information and training programs from remote locations eliminates the need for trainers to work directly with new hires on all training. Some interaction will always be necessary on some level, of course, but training in virtual classrooms makes it possible for the HR professionals to train a large number of employees quickly and to assess their progress through computerized testing programs.

### **Data Storage and Retrieval**

Human resources professionals generally process a considerable amount of paperwork and also have to keep much of that paperwork on file for a considerable period of time. The use of electronic imaging has made it possible for companies to store and retrieve files in an electronic format. Technology also makes it possible for human resources professionals to simply print the forms that are needed for employees. Printing on demand eliminates the need to dig through an endless number of files in the file cabinet to find what is needed.

Those of us who have been hired know that it is necessary to complete forms so that we can become an "official" employee. The type of information requested usually includes first name, last name, address, emergency contacts, banking information, beneficiaries for benefit plans, marital status, and of course Social Insurance Number. There are data and the human resources (HR) department has always been the custodian of employee data. The type of data collected, where the data are stored, how the data are used, and the type of system used for these purposes has changed over time, but the need to collect information relating to hiring, promoting, and firing employees has not changed. HR technology is increasingly being used by small, medium, and large employers to meet the needs of its stakeholders (Bulmash, 2006).

### **Performance Management**

Enhanced performance management is another byproduct of technological improvement. Human resources professionals can use computer technology to assess employee performance and also to get employee feedback to be used for the betterment of the organization. Various software programs make it possible for human resources professionals to examine employee performance using metrics to ensure that employees are meeting performance standards. Employees that don't measure up can be subjected to additional training or let go in favor a replacement who can come in and do the job. <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/technology-impact-hr-practices-37912.html>

## **Strategies for Improving Material Resources in the Nigerian Local Government System**

### **Proper Facility Inventory**

The whole essence of material resources management is to ensure productivity and efficiency of the council. A thorough inventory (listing, recording and accounting) of the properties of the local government becomes paramount. The haphazard and lackadaisical attitude of local government officials to the facilities and infrastructures of the councils lead to wastage of the meager resources at the disposal of the council with which to accomplish a giant task of bringing development to the grassroots. There is a dire need to ensure a proper inventory of the facilities of the local government to ensure efficient operation of the system.

### **Better Office Management**

In the public sector, there is no better way of determining competent level than office management. The kind of office we operate in determine our job enrichment. A proper office management will boost the morale of the office occupant and ensure efficiency of work. The management of the offices stems from the council boss and the legislators who make the decisions hence provision of good office and its equipments as well as rules of maintenance are your responsibilities, while proper utilization and maintenance of that of the career local government workers.

### **Adequate Office Equipment Provision and Utilization**

Adequacy of office equipment is a must for the local government councils in Nigeria to thrive. Office management trends are changing and we have to move with the trend. Gone are the days of typewriters. High technologically based office equipments have made jobs easy, less stressful and interesting, hence the need to embrace them.

Again, there is the need for confidentiality. When council's memos are typed outside the office in the business centres, the confidentiality is lost and the dignity of the office is reduced. Therefore, there is dire need for adequate office equipment and qualified Staff to handle them for efficient service delivery.

### **Better File Management and Record Keeping**

Better file management and record keeping is paramount in every organization. The way records are disposed in Nigerian public sector is worrisome. This is why Nigerians do not believe that our planning will fare better in the future. The local government is not exempted. They also manage their files and filing systems shabbily hence the need to have a better and enhanced filing system and management because by default, they are to ensure people's development and you cannot achieve that without proper planning and without proper record keeping, there will be no proper planning.

### **Adequate Provision of Offices and Office-Related Infrastructures**

The Nigerian local government councils should as a matter of necessity improve on their office and office related infrastructures. The people working in the councils are human whose talents need to be properly managed. Their contribution to work should be done in a conducive environment. Unconducive environments cannot produce good results. Besides they will be forced to start comparing their status with

their counterparts in the federal and state civil services, and when the result is not impressive, it adversely affect their morales which is reflected in their attitude to work.

### **Effective Official Movements**

The need for effective official movement is obvious. The local governments should ensure easy of movement of their staffs while coming to work and leaving and when at work. Without official ease of movement the pace of work in the council will be reduced and efficiency jeopardized. In fact, having a local government official staff buses that conveys them to and fro their office will add value to their work and help in boosting their morale and in turn increase work efficiency.

### **Good Maintenance Culture**

There is also the need to ensure maintenance culture in our local government. This is the shortest means of achieving material resource management because after procurement, if the facilities are not maintained, either huge amount of money will be spent in repairing them or it will be spent in outright placement. Unfortunately, the Nigerian public sector has been so accused of lack of maintenance culture hence the need for it to be imbibed in the local government. The responsibility is on both political and career local government servants.

### **Conclusion**

In every area of development, human and material resources play an indispensable role. Badly managed, the human and material resources of an organization can limit their progress in every direction. If the human resources are effectively managed and planned, their knowledge, powers, skills, and competence can lead to available social and economic progress, likewise the material resources.

In fact, manpower resource is a product of an organization's life – its quality or its inferior nature. An organization with inadequate human resources, even when it has other limitless resources, will remain a poor and unprogressive organization so long as the bulk of its staff remain illiterate, and, has people with no saleable skills and competence to harness the organization's financial and material resources for effective and efficient performance.

Well-managed human resources with well-managed material resources will precede success and efficient local government system.

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