



Social Science of Municipal [Local] Government and Administration

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ABSTRACT:- It is argued that municipal government and administration is now an independent science or discipline just like political science, public administration, economics, psychology and sociology are sciences. Municipal government and administration deals with governmental activities at the local terrain in their own right.

Keywords:- Social science of municipal government and administration

I. PURPOSE OF ARTICLE

In the study of public administration, scholars and practitioners are likely to come across the phrase applied public administration which may cover the following areas of geographical fields of application, that is, international administration, central administration, provincial or regional administration, and local or municipal administration [S.B.M. Marume: 2015]. This article deals with local (municipal) government and administration as a science. It needs to be appreciated that local [municipal] government and administration is now a separate science or discipline just like political science, public administration, economics, psychology, sociology and so on. Local government and administration as a science deals with the governmental activities at the local terrain.

MUNICIPAL [LOCAL] GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

General remarks

Before starting to discuss this topic, it is necessary to consider what is meant by local government and administration and why a country has local government and administration. This complex question is difficult to answer in a few words. This lecture will serve to try to explain what local government and administration is about, and to list some reasons for having it. It will be followed by further lectures at later dates, which will tell you something of the history of local government and administration, generally, throughout the world; and go on to discuss the developments, the types and kinds, and the detailed operations of local government and administration in Africa in general and in our own country, Zimbabwe, in particular.

WHY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION?

The desirability of local government authorities in a country as explained as follows:

Necessity for geographically dispersed general purpose local units

Probably the most important reason for local government bodies, both in developing countries and developed world, is the fact that different public services must be integrated, or arranged, according to some criteria. Without geographically dispersed general – purpose local units of government, the central government could not integrate and coordinate all the demands and requirements covering a country location. This would be impossible in all but the smallest most thinly populated countries. So we are left with the premise that local government and administration is necessary. The question is, now, to what extent general – purpose units of local government and administration should be developed and assigned functions. The reasons apply with equal validity to both appointed bodies and representative local government boards to perform specific functions. These then would be the central government's reasons for creating local government bodies.

PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Let us consider the reasons for having local government and administration from the people's point of view. Certain interests are primarily of local concern. These are activities which are usually better administered at a local level.

The use of local government authorities gives the local inhabitants the opportunity to exert a degree of control over the public administration of their own areas. The citizen thus has easier access to the people who run his/her affairs and there is a greater sense of self-identity with local government than with central administration.

UNIVERSAL ARGUMENTS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

On a comparative basis, local government and administration has certain attributes which may be summed up as follows:

- a. Those who run local services are local people responsive to local needs, attitudes, and expectations.
- b. It permits close contact between the governed and those who govern. This means that when administration is at local level, people can get in touch directly with the persons who make the decisions [local councillors] and the officials who carry out these decisions.
- c. It facilitates continuity of policy. While local councils are usually run on political party lines, most decisions are of an administrative character, so that only on few issues are there a political division. Therefore, generally speaking, all councillors can work together to decide the best long-term policies for the community, be it urban or rural community.
- d. It provides for a division of power between central government and local authorities in a two-tier government or a division of powers and functions in a three-tier governmental system between central government, provincial and metropolitan councils, and local authorities. Thus, a local protest, for example, on a proposed airport or railway line, serves to remind the central government that its decisions must be of necessity respect local feelings, loyalties and traditions.
- e. Local government authorities lighten the burden of administration – which would otherwise put a severe strain on central government.
- f. Local government and administration provides real opportunities for functional democracy, that is, the government of the people, by the people, for the people and with the people.

WHAT THEN IS LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION?

Although there are many definitions about this subject, this article confines itself to the following;

Definition of local government and administration

Having briefly pointed out some of the general reasons for the existence of local government authorities, time appears ripe to define what is meant by local government and administration. There are many definitions. For our purpose, it may suffice to concentrate our efforts on the following definition:

Thus municipal or local government and administration deals with the administrative processes at what is commonly called in a third-tier system of government the third tier or level of government; the other two being Central Government at the national level, and the provincial and metropolitan government and administration at the middle or intermediary level.

Characteristics of level of government and administration

In Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria, Australia, and Mozambique, as examples, three tiers of government exist. In Zimbabwe specifically, there are the central Government; provincial and metropolitan councils, and local authorities [section 5 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013].

Each of these three levels of government and administration has:

- a. a physical area of jurisdiction, the higher level including the areas of the middle and lowest levels;
- b. functional sphere of jurisdiction;
- c. a democratically elected and responsible body;
- d. an executive body constituted from the selected representatives (not of country-wide application to local government); and
- e. an administrative hierarchy of professional permanent public service officials to carry out the will of the governors and administer the various functions concerned.

Local government and administration has been referred to as government and administration at grass-roots' level. It is the form of government and administration closest in terms of proximity to the lives of ordinary citizens of the state or nation.

CRITICS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION:

Inevitably, there are those critics who will always raise technical arguments as to whether it is government and administration at all or whether it is merely 'local administration,' which is a direct decentralization of central administration.

Real life-arguments for local government

Powers and functions

But the fact of the matter is that municipal councils, town councils, local boards and rural district councils have the powers in terms of Acts of Parliament or provincial ordinances of each of the first two levels of government, to make their own by-laws or regulations on a fairly wide range of local matters from advertising, aeriads, aerodromes, amenities, animals through buildings, funeral parlours, electricity, fires, gas and markets to nuisances, public entertainment, streets, traders, traffic and water. These sorts of powers are all given to municipalities, in the case of South Africa, Nigeria, India, Canada and Australia, by the provincial councils. Other powers to make regulations are given by certain Acts of Parliament.

Agencies of central government

In regard to certain other matters, municipal and rural district councils, in the cases of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Nigeria, administer **certain services or functions** at the local level largely on behalf of or substantially funded or subsidized by the Central Government, that is, education, roads, health services, and housing.

CONSEQUENCES OF INDUSTRIALIZATION, URBANIZATION AND POPULATION INCREASE

In South Africa, Zimbabwe and Nigeria, as well as in many other parts of the world, we have in the last eighty years been witnessing the rapid urbanization of the countries in company with the so-called population explosion. From the 1920s to 1990s the urban populations in Southern Africa comprising Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC], Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, for examples, have increased dramatically. With political independence to all African countries in the 1960s, 70s, 80s, 1990 and majority rule government in South Africa in 1994, nearly half of the populations now live in urban areas, and peri-urban areas.

It also appears to be clear that the larger urban concentrations have been a greater population drawing power than the smaller concentrations. This has been particularly noticeable in the Cape, Transvaal, Kinshasa, Accra, Lagos, Lilongwe, Lusaka, Harare and Bulawayo Metropolitan Provinces, and so on over the last few decades where the financial viability of a number of small towns or village communities has been questioned and various financial or administrative remedies suggested.

City governments as big businesses

The larger towns and cities continue to expand, a number of them on a contiguous basis and forming large cities like Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria, Acra, Lagos, Harare and Lusaka bear comparison with the budget of one of the smaller provincial administrations; then city government is big business – business which has an impact on the national economy. This is why the State Treasuries control the annual maxima of the capital budgets of most of the larger local authorities.

Sophistication of urban 'citizen' demands

In the larger towns and cities too – the trend towards the sophistication of citizens' demands on the governing authorities is very much evident. The urban citizens seem to want more, bigger or better roads for rapid transit, a library service, including reference works and long playing fields, not too far from their homes or offices; sophisticated or Olympic sized swimming baths within accessible distance from city homes, even if this be within a few kilometers from the sea in the case of South Africa, Mozambique and Tanzania; parks with swings and other children's equipment every blocks; tartan tracks, civic halls, in spite of the many under-utilized school and church halls, and so on and so forth. Citizens or, should I say rather a minority percentage of self-expressive citizens have at recent years become more environmentally conscious or articulate about the environment; more inconsistent of public participation; more conscious of the need to assist orthodox democratic channels by having an avenue of expression or making more representations to assist decision-making in addition to normal concillor representation.

Supply of basic services

Supplying the basic services of light, clean and safe water, sewage, refuse removal, roads, fire, community health and the convenience services such as parks, sport fields, markets, civil halls, swimming baths and the more sophisticated services such as libraries and orchestral concerts form a large part of the day to day administration of municipalities whose income derives from various tariffs and license fees but principally rates levied on private immovable property, but not state owned or other categories of exempted property. In normal times, local authorities are fairly hard pressed to cope financially with the rate of urbanization but in times of financial stringency, like the present, citizens have to be very controlled in the demands and requirements and very tolerant in regard to the increases in tariffs and rates.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AS CLOSEST FORM OF GOVERNMENT TO PEOPLE

Local government and administration remains the form of government and administration closest to daily lives of people and possibly, therefore, more easily attracts a greater degree of criticism.

Constructive criticism

Constructive criticism can be helpful indeed but unenlightened criticism can be a disturbing social force not calculated to achieve real community development benefits. The democratically elected representatives of responsible people are under a duty to keep in touch with the feelings of the electorate and to interpret these feelings in relation to the policy objectives of what must be done in the community; how and to what standard it should be done, and in what order of priority on a limited budget.

Sound and professional local administration:

Professional officials are there to recommend and guide in policy formulation and to carry out the decisions of local council in the most effective, efficient and economical way possible with fairness and dignity. A keen enlightened interest in local affairs is generally regarded as contributing substantially to the good health of local government and administration in the 21st century Zimbabwe and beyond.

II. WHAT THEN IS THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION?

If we had sufficient time and scope to teach the subject in full at its current stage of development, we would have used an outline as appears herein under. This is, however, not quite possible under the prevailing circumstances. But choice of courses is based in large measure on this outline.

1. History of local government.
2. Theory of Local government;
 - 2.1. The nature and scope of the subject.
 - 2.2. Introduction to Municipal Government and Administration
 - 2.3. Relationship of the subject with other subjects.
3. The place of local authorities in the state.
4. A comparative study of local government systems in various countries: Great Britain, USA, France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, and Australia; India, South Africa, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.
5. Types and geographical distribution of local authorities.
6. The role of the council and committees; establishment of towns, cities and metropolitan areas; politics and municipal elections.
7. The powers and functions of local authorities.
8. The municipal administrative process, that is,
 - (a) municipal policy
 - (b) organisation (or theory of organisation)
 - (c) municipal personnel administration
 - (d) municipal financial administration
 - (e) methods and procedure at work
 - (f) control measures and evaluation mechanisms
9. Problems and challenges associated with the management and provision of quality services on a sustainable, continuous and affordable basis both in developed and developing communities.
10. Relationship of local authorities with provincial councils and central government institutions (intergovernmental relations): that is, rules of procedure for and control over local authorities by higher authorities.
11. Epistemological and methodological approaches and schools of thought in the study of municipal government and administration [Morgan and Kirkpatrick, Wickwar, McCandles, J.J.N. Cloete, Reddy, Humes and Martin]'

III. CONCLUSION

The conclusion is reached that municipal (local) government and administration is in effect a science subject, discipline with a well – defined and delineated field of study

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