

Intergovernmental Harmony: An Imperative for Navigating Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

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Abstract

The reality in the world today has to accommodate the distortions and unprecedented global challenges necessitated by the coronavirus disease which has affected all aspects of human endeavours, thus demanding swift response from the government to chart the course through the pandemic into progress and normalcy as the pandemic has greatly affected all sphere ranging from economic, social, health, educational, to religious aspect of life. An understanding of the crucial role of government in mobilising necessary stakeholders across relevant sectors and levels of government has made harmonious intergovernmental relations paramount in navigating the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria because all actors must be deliberately engaged in a coordinated manner while leveraging a result-oriented approach to achieve the desired outcome. The methodology used for this research work is qualitative in nature with reliance on secondary data. Systems theory is the adopted theoretical base of analysis, thus, informing the stance of this discourse that intergovernmental relations is key in effectively navigating

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the pandemic in Nigeria. The study identified that the usual acrimonious interplay between all levels of government in Nigeria will be antithetical to the post-covid-19 developmental effort of the Nigerian State, hence, there is the need for synergy, common alliance, coordination, and unity of purpose between and among all levels of government targeted at making her developmental efforts during and after the pandemic plausible. This study recommends a robust intergovernmental management system that will help coordinate the interactions and relationships between the various governmental levels and actors as this will catalyse sustainable progress in battling the pandemic.

Keywords: Coronavirus, Development, Federalism, Intergovernmental Relations and Nigeria

Introduction

It is pertinent to say that there are fundamental underpinning factors that determine the system of governance and administration in every society. The decision of a state to adopt a system of government hinges on its peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. Nigeria's decision to adopt federal practice was necessitated by the high level of heterogeneity and ethnic multiplicity as well as the need to encompass individual identities and facilitate political accommodation. Intergovernmental relations are important parts of the modern political system and are adjudged to be integral characteristics of federal practices; however, they can be evident in political settings with two or more subnational units. An important element of federal practice in Nigeria is intergovernmental relations, which is a vital ingredient for meaningful development and progress in every society. The aforementioned position centres on the fact that development is a product of effective collaboration between stakeholders across all levels of government, hence, cooperative intergovernmental relations are imperatives for efficient management and implementation of public policies based on coordination and shared competencies. The coronavirus pandemic has triggered huge distortions in all strata of life, thereby necessitating the expediency for

pragmatic strides by the government targeted at bringing succour to its people. Nigeria is not left out of as the imprint of the pandemic has created an epochal effect in the lives of the people. It is needless to say that there is the need for deliberate steps by the government targeted at successfully managing the pandemic and coasting towards the path of recovery. To make this a reality, it is imperative to understand that an effective and synergetic intergovernmental relations system is important for the attainment of the desired developmental goal and for navigating the Nigerian State out of its plight. An understanding that no government can achieve its desired feat in isolation but working harmoniously with other actors gives credence to intergovernmental relations as cooperation and harmony become prerequisites for success.

To successfully navigate the pandemic in Nigeria, all actors must work together, synchronising all actions to reflect harmony and cordiality. The onus does not exclusively rest on intergovernmental relations alone but also on multi-sectoral cooperation as it is evident that the implication of the pandemic has triggered far-reaching effects on all facets of life from the economy, health, education, security, and too many others. To this end, there is the need for a robust multi-sectoral collaboration, complementarities, and mutual independence supported by harmonious intergovernmental relations. There is no gainsaying that the present intergovernmental relations practices in Nigeria are characterised by unnecessary tensions and hostilities and as such would be counterproductive in addressing the pandemic. Proffering far-reaching solutions to the existing challenge requires building systems harmonised with a common purpose. It is against this background that this study seeks to apprise that intergovernmental relations are *sine qua non* for the recovery of the Nigerian State during this pandemic. It also draws deep insights on governmental relations issues across all levels of government in Nigeria however, articulating that the clamour for restructuring should not be hinged on decimating the federal government's capacity as the central authority but on the premise of intergovernmental coordination and coherence which is indispensable for the functioning of the federal practice since component units will always need one another. The study makes feasible recommendations on the need for an ideological shift in intergovernmental relations and the need to establish a purpose-driven

relationship and interaction, not one hinged on merely satisfying constitutional provisions but a dynamic relationship that sees all units as important stakeholders in addressing challenges in the federal polity.

Conceptual Clarification

Coronavirus Pandemic

It is apparent that there is an unprecedented global health challenge with the outbreak of the dreaded Coronavirus disease which broke out in Wuhan, China. There has been a transnational spread of the disease to virtually all continents of the world excluding Antarctica thereby necessitating the need for states to put complete or partial lockdown and border control measures in place based on their peculiarities to mitigate the spread of the virus.

The World Health Organisation affirmed that coronavirus (Covid-19) is an extremely infectious disease instigated by the novel coronavirus which is capable of transmitting exponentially. The disease is most potent with a high propensity of resulting in fatality in older people, those with respiratory diseases, and other underlying health conditions (WHO, 2020). Coronavirus is a respiratory illness usually transmitted through contact with infected surfaces, persons, and objects (NCDC, 2020). On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organisation confirmed coronavirus as a global health-threatening challenge owing to its fast rate of transmission (Phelan, Katz, & Gostin, 2020).

The virus necessitated the introduction of several safety precautions and health practices such as regular hand washing, hand sanitising as well as the adherence to social distancing. The far-reaching effect of the virus has greatly shaped all aspects of human lives as workers have had to imbibe the act of working from home, while schools, and worship centres have had to close down to reduce the rate of human contact, thereby cushioning the spread of the virus.

Intergovernmental Relations

Ayoade (1980) addressed the federal bias and misconception associated with the concept of IGR as advanced by few that IGR can only be expressively engaged within a federal practice. He posited that Graves (1974) opined that “intergovernmental relation is the same with federalism.”

Reagan (1972) also equated federalism with intergovernmental relations by positing that federalism “old style” is dead hence, there is a “New style” federalism which is intergovernmental relations”. The aforementioned scholars basically advanced the narrative that federalism and intergovernmental relations are similar. The impression articulated by Reagan can be viewed as an attestation to the relevance and increasing importance of the interaction between governmental levels in the processes of federalism and should not be misconstrued as reducing the discourse of intergovernmental relations to federal practice alone. To support this, Cameroon (2001:121) labelled intergovernmental relations “as the workhorse of any federal system; it is the privileged instrument by which the job-whatever the job- gets done.” What can be drawn from the aforementioned position is that intergovernmental relations are salient in federalism owing to its capacity to successfully manage the snowballing interface between governmental levels in the federal arrangement and its capacity to also foster intergovernmental harmony (Aiyede, 2004). Ayoade (1980) went further to clarify this misconception when he averred that intergovernmental relation incorporates farther than the concept of federalism that focuses on nation-state relationship with little or no consideration of inter-state and intrastate relationships as captured in Wright (1974). Notwithstanding, the practice of intergovernmental relations is usually more explicit and acrimonious in a federal system of government (Ayoade, 1980).

Intergovernmental relations can be best examined from three schools of thought (Bamgbose 2008). The first sees intergovernmental relations as possible only in a federal arrangement, the second school of thought sees the possibility of intergovernmental relations existing in a federal system and also the unitary system of government, the third school of thought expresses the view that intergovernmental relations captures external and foreign relations, that is the interactions between sovereign/national governments (Bamgbose, 2008).

It is imperative to state that the discourse on intergovernmental relations focuses on domestic interactions and excludes relationships between sovereign/national governments; it does not focus on diplomatic relations which is an entirely different type of political relationship from the central idea of intergovernmental relations (Ayoade, 1980). From the

aforementioned, it can be said that IGR can exist in a federal and also a unitary arrangement but it is usually more robust in a federal practice as a result of its inbuilt arrangement to ideally support decentralisation of power and functions which is a necessity for intergovernmental relations to thrive.

Sequels to the above clarification, many definitions have been ascribed to intergovernmental relations. Intergovernmental relation is the totality of interactions and relationships between and among governmental levels in a political system. The one reputed to be the originator of the term, William Anderson, defined intergovernmental relations as “an important body of activities and interactions occurring between (or among) governmental units of all types and levels within the United States federal system” (Anderson, 1960:3). The aforementioned definition conceives IGR as only possible in the federal arrangement (Aiyede, 2004). Other scholars like Wright opined that intergovernmental relations involve a variety of activities, interactions, and meanings not dependent on the availability of federalism (Wright, 1982 in Aiyede, 2004). A deeper insight was given by the exposition that “the concept of intergovernmental relations is often associated with federalism because the study of federalism at its most empirical level heavily stresses the importance of intergovernmental relations” (Bamidele 1980:207). What can be deduced from the aforementioned scholarly standpoints is that intergovernmental relations is salient to federal practice and as such it is usually at the centre in the discourse of federalism. This is not to conclude that IGR can occur only in a federal arrangement as IGR can also be present in the unitary system. Intergovernmental relations is an interactive and relational network existing across governmental levels which are envisaged to permit the coexistence of various governments in a mode that aligns with their institutional provisions (Colasante, 2019). It should be noted that this interaction is not limited to formal structures alone but also captures the informal aspects such as the behaviours, attitude, and human relations between actors existing at various levels of government (cited in Abidoye, 2015). Intergovernmental relations is characterised by various organised levels or parts involved in an array of transaction or interaction in a state (Olugbemi 1980 in Okoli & Onah, 2002). It can be drawn from the above definition that intergovernmental relations encompass a network of relationships where different levels of government interact to advance their

various interests. Ibietan (2011) affirmed that Okoli and Onah's definition perfectly reflects the Nigerian strand of intergovernmental relation which is characterised by inimical competition, targeted at selfish accumulations at the detriment of other levels of government, rather than coherence between the various component units.

Adamolekun (2002) construed intergovernmental relations as a concept that captures the existent interactions, dealings, exchanges, and collaboration evident in the various levels of government in a state. In federal systems, IGR are mirrored by the relationship between the central government and the sub-national levels while the key underpinning features guiding such interactions are well articulated in the constitution. In true federal practice, subnational units are coordinate. In the unitary system, the division of powers, responsibilities, and functions of subnational units are usually absent in the constitution as the central government is the determinate authority that determines the functions and responsibilities allotted to the subnational unit. Here, the central government can decide to adjust either by expanding or limiting these powers and functions without recourse to the constitution. In this system, subnational units are subordinate to the central authority and the substance and style of intergovernmental relations are determined by the central government (Ibietan, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

An understanding of the significance of the theoretical framework as a guide to empirical research has necessitated the adoption of systems theory as the framework for analysing the subject of this paper. System theory is considered important to this discourse because of its relevance and applicability to the central theme of the study which emphasises the need for a proper harmonisation of governmental systems and actors in successfully navigating the coronavirus pandemic.

According to Egwu *et al.* (2016), a system can be seen as a collection of partners cooperating for the actualisation of a common purpose. It can be drawn from the conceptualisation that every system comprises of subsystems that are usually integrated into a whole. Each of the sub-systems is considered a veritable and essential part of the success of the integrated

whole. The proper functionality of the system is dependent on the coordination and efficiency of the sub-systems (Egwu *et al.* 2016).

Bunge (2004) conceptualised a system as a compound object made up of various interconnected components. It can be deduced from this expression that a system is a collection of several parts which are held together by bonds. Their union can be targeted at achieving a common purpose, hence, there exists a sense of mutual indispensability and interdependence between the parts. Similar to the aforementioned, Ile (2007) construed a system as a unified whole that is made up of several parts just like a human body where the distinct parts are seen as interdependent and interrelated, regardless that each part may function on its own, it still does affect the functionality and outcome of the entire body. Sequel to the above, it can be affirmed that a system is a whole with uniquely interconnected and interdependent parts.

The systems theory was conceived by a biologist named Ludwig Von Bertalanffy. Scholars like David Easton (1957) adopted the model to elucidate on his work; “an approach of analysis in political systems” where he likened the political society to a system which comprises the different parts that receive demands and support (inputs). The inputs are converted into policies and decisions (outputs), while the output generates feedback that again passes through the system as the cycle continues (Easton, 1957). The systems theory has been widely adopted by other researchers in the field of social sciences.

The essence of systems theory, as opined by Egwu *et al.* (2016), is to emphasise the role, importance, and synergy of subsystems to enable the whole system to function efficiently. Ile (2007) extended this argument by holding that the necessity for a system approach is non-negotiable for the comprehension of the working of government as a result of the networks embedded in the process of governance. Hague and Harrop (1982) went further to posit that the task of coordination is daunting not only because of the expansive state of government but because issues that government have to address are becoming dynamic and more complex. The activities of government take place within these systems with necessary sub-systems interacting for the overall goal. One key purpose of intergovernmental relations is expediting the achievement of positive outcomes through

harmonious interactions of all actors in the system (Hague and Harrop, 1982 in Ile, 2007).

The focus is on the significance of coherence and synergy in the activities of government and the importance for various elements of the government to be well connected, cooperative, and in alignment with the vision of the whole and as such working harmoniously with other actors across the board for the achievement of the desired objective.

Applicability of Systems Theory to the Discourse

A profound nexus can be seen between the systems theory and the topic under review as the Nigerian state can be likened to the political system while the levels, organs, and agencies of government in Nigeria can be seen as the parts or subsystems. The success of the Nigerian state is heavily dependent on the interplay between the various parts of government. However, for Nigeria to successfully navigate the coronavirus pandemic, there must be a harmonious and coordinated intergovernmental relationship between and among the actors at each governmental level captured in the system. Similarly, the formulation and implementation of policies targeted as recovering from the coronavirus pandemic would require that each level and organ of government functions in a cooperative manner as the activities of each sub-system would affect the proper functioning of the entire government. According to the systems theory, if a sub-system malfunctions or becomes defective, this will be antithetical to the functionality of the entire system as the success of the whole system is directly proportional to the relationship between that system and its subsystems. Hence, for Nigeria to successfully recover from the coronavirus pandemic, there is the need to promote a relational and synergetic approach to intergovernmental relations between all the governmental levels and actors.

Intergovernmental Relations in Nigeria: An Overview

IGR in Nigeria speaks to the existing interactions and relationships between and among the central, state, and local governments. The civil war, military rule, and the oil economy are key factors considered as important to the discourse on federalism and intergovernmental relations in Nigeria. These factors have not only had far-reaching effects on the structures of IGR, but

have also shaped the substance, style, and functions of intergovernmental institutions in Nigeria (Aiyede, 2005). Nigeria which became a federation in 1954 operated a federal system with a weak centre until the military seized power via *coup d'état* in 1966 (Aiyede, 2005). However, the character of the military regime which reflected autocracy, hierarchy, unity of command, and centralisation contradicted the reality of federalism in Nigeria. This contradiction led to the abrogation of the federal system by G.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi and the introduction of the unitary system of government whose tenets aligned with military *modus operandi* (Osaghae, 2018). This had an epochal impact on the permutations and combinations of intergovernmental relations in Nigeria.

The heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian State had made it well suited for a federal system of government. Aside from the diverse ethnic groups inherent in Nigeria, the constitution also prescribed the adoption of three governmental levels- the federal, state, and local government, with consideration for power and responsibility-sharing between the centre and subnational levels. The presence of the three levels of government has made intergovernmental relations increasingly important (Nnaeto, 2016). The aforementioned is also supported by Cameroon (2001) who opined that intergovernmental relations are the pillar and engine room of any federal practice. It can be deduced from this that intergovernmental relations are a crucial factor that makes federalism works.

An investigation into intergovernmental relations in Nigeria reveals that IGR captures the entirety of the relationship and interaction between the levels or tiers of government in a state. It is pertinent to point out that the expression "level" can either refer to a higher or lower level hence, intergovernmental relations can exist within the same level (intra-governmental relations) and can also depict hierarchical relationships and interaction. In a federal arrangement like Nigeria, IGR captures the existing interaction between the central government and subnational units while the distribution of powers and functions are to be adhered to as stated in the constitution. For obvious reasons, the system and arrangement for managing intergovernmental relations are usually more elaborate and profound in federal systems than in the unitary and confederal system of government. Ayode (1980) opined that six levels of intergovernmental relations are

visible in Nigeria since it became a federation in 1954. The first of these is the Nation-State relations, which connotes the relationship between the centre and the state. An example of this relationship is evident in Nigeria between the central government and Lagos State, Kano State as well as other hot zones of the coronavirus outbreak where the Federal Government helped by providing financial and technical assistance to help tackle the pandemic. There is also the Nation-State-Local relations that refers to the relationship between the three levels of government. Collaboration might be necessitated between the three tiers of government on security or natural disaster. An example is the Abule Ado gas explosion in Lagos State. Nation-Local relations is yet another level of relation in Nigeria. It is the interaction that exists between the central government and the local government. This might be necessitated by the need for the centre to intervene on issues that exceed the response capacity of the state. For instance, federal government intervention in Oyo State aimed at cushioning the effect of flooding that affected some local governments (Agboola, Ajayi, Taiwo, and Wahab, 2012). There is, in addition, the Inter-State relations, which is the relationship between two or more state governments that can be targeted at carrying out developmental projects and activities affecting the states. An example is the joint ownership and management of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso by Oyo and Osun States. There is also the establishment of a south-western security outfit called Amotekun which was established to improve security in the six south-western states. The Inter-State relation is often feasible and cordial when the states belong to a similar political party. Furthermore, there is State-Local relations that connotes the relationship and interaction that exist between the state and local government within the same state. Finally, there is Inter-Local relations, which refers to the interaction between local governments. This can exist between local governments with close boundaries who might decide to come together to construct a link road, bridge, or collaborate to address challenges peculiar to them.

As part of the analysis into Nigeria's intergovernmental relations since it became a federation in 1954, Ayoade (1980) advanced three hypotheses. The first hypothesis avers that "the nature of IGR at the Nation-State, Nation-State-Local, Nation-Local and State-State level is a product of the

degree of heterogeneity in the polity which gave rise to the federal solution” (Ayoade, 1980:14). The second hypothesis advanced says that the relative affluence of the National government in relation to the states as well as the relative affluence of one state in relation to other states is the key determinant if such nation will be a nation-centred or state-centred federation. Consequently, considering the possibility of the fiscal status of the nation and state to change over time, federalism and intergovernmental relations becomes a continuous and dynamic process, therefore IGR is not a one-time, stipulated occurrence formally codified in agreements or rigidly enshrined by court pronouncements (Cited in Ayoade, 1980). The third hypothesis, according to Ayoade (1980), holds that the IGR at the State-Local and Local-Local levels are a resultant effect of the level of heterogeneity in the state as well as the political party affiliation at the state and local levels.

Ayoade (1980) went further to elaborate on the hypotheses. The first hypothesis suggests that political systems with a high level of diversity are better suited for federalism, in the same vein, political systems with more homogenous elements are better suited for a unitary system of government. Max Beloff (1953) also supported the aforementioned by opining that size, ethnolinguistic and cultural diversity can necessitate a federal constitution. Federalism is, therefore, a device for encompassing diversity and political accommodation and can also be seen as a process of desiring unity without uniformity. Ayoade (1980) went further averring that the level of heterogeneity between the people in the federation determines the type of the federation. There are two types of federation. In the aggregative federation, previously autonomous units come together to form a union. This is borne out of the need to maximise a particular state apparatus i.e. security or a common currency, the United States perfectly fits into this category. Here, IGR at the Nation-State, Nation-State-Local, Nation-Local, and State-State is usually harmonious hence, there is a feeling of mutual indispensability and interdependence in the aggregative federal system. The second type is the disaggregate federation in which previously unitary states decided to disaggregate for federalism. This is premised on the need to recognise and encompass different identities in the state. A cordial Intergovernmental relation becomes difficult in such a system because of

the absence of common goals, as is obtainable in the aggregative system. Here, IGR is usually minimal and conflictual since their interests are mutually exclusive. Such a situation is likely to encourage state-centred federalism with political parties heavily weighted in favour of the state (Ayoade, 1980). The diversity hypothesis was also challenged by Charles D. Tarlton who posited that wherever diversity is dominant, a unitary system will be better. In the same vein, a society with less diversity will be better suited for a federal system of government because the similar elements will function at a great level of harmony (Tarlton, 1965 in Ayoade, 1980).

The second hypothesis elaborated in Ayoade (1980) says the state-centred status or the nation-centred status of the federation and IGR is dependent on the affluence of the national government when compared to that of the state or the affluence of one state when compared to other states. It can be deduced that when resources are inequitably distributed between states, the wealthy states in the disaggregative federation are more likely to prevent the flow of their wealth to the less wealthy states and this is as a result of the unavailability of cordial relationship, which will consequently reduce the prospect for IGR. The resultant effect of this is that less wealthy states begin to clamour for a nation-centred federation because their interest will be protected under such arrangements. The wealthy state prefers the state-centred federal system and at worse becomes vociferous supporters for secession since their financial capacity supports independence. This was evident in Nigeria from 1950-1970 as each of the three regions of the federation either called for state-centred federation or secession. Even to date, there are several clamours for state-centred federation and secession threats from economically viable states. The aforementioned challenges that characterise the interaction among various levels of government further diminish the prospects of intergovernmental relations in Nigeria. Ayoade (1980) opined that the scenario is different when the national government is wealthier than the constituent units. Irrespective of the provisions of the constitution, the viable centre tends to create a nation-centred federation since the national government is the sole source of revenue. This arrangement destabilises the federal system constitutionally and politically as the centre tends to become overbearing and high handed. This practice also overburdens the centre that sees no

reason decentralising powers and functions to the constituent (Ayoade, 1980).

Ayoade (1980) in elaborating the third hypothesis averred that state-local and local-local IGR is based on the heterogeneity of the state and the diversity along with political party affiliation. The cordiality of the Intergovernmental relationship between the state-local, local-local will be determined by the political parties. For instance, if the same political party controls the state and the local government, there is a high tendency that IGR will most likely be peaceful but in cases where states and local governments have different political party affiliations, intergovernmental relations are going to be asymmetric and rancorous. In such a case, the state can decide to stop funding the local government or at worse dissolve such local government as seen in Oyo State and Ekiti State, Nigeria (Aliyu, 2016). In addition, when the local governments have different party affiliations, inter-local interaction will be greatly affected as the local units will develop distrust and find it difficult to work together.

A plausible premise from the three hypotheses advanced by Ayoade (1980) is that the patterns and form of intergovernmental relations in Nigeria have largely been shaped by revenue allocation, party politics, selfish accumulation of profits, secession threats, power centralisation, leading to a more acrimonious, rather than harmonious interaction. The aforementioned aberrations are inimical to the Nigerian states' response to the coronavirus pandemic, hence the need to tinker with intergovernmental relations in Nigeria and get it better positioned for present realities.

Intergovernmental Harmony: Towards Traversing COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

This discourse centres exploring and repositioning of intergovernmental relations in Nigeria in order that they may serve as drivers of development and the effective management of the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria. Nnaeto (2016) appraised cooperative federalism as an important component for achieving good governance in a federal system. He posits that when the levels of government in Nigeria synergise in areas like policy implementation, resource control, devolution of responsibilities, information dissemination, then the attainment of national development will be feasible.

Nnaeto (2016) observed that the notion of intergovernmental relation in Nigeria mirrors the existence of many structures in the forms of actors, levels, and agencies of government that need to function in a coordinated manner for the ultimate attainment of goals. Akume (2016) also supported the aforementioned by averring that IGR, if well positioned, can help in facilitating vital interactions by mobilising all actors for development. Akinbobola (2009) opined that intergovernmental relations become a critical tool for mobilisation of expertise and resources and also for other demands that the government might be confronted with. The above effusion explicates that the government is usually faced with unprecedented demands which require cross-sectorial, multi-level collaborations. In addition, Ikelegbe (2004) identified the importance of cooperation and collaboration by building a system of joint and harmonised actions for the management of public problems. Importantly, IGR promotes development by leveraging synergy, coordination, consultation, bargaining, negotiation, and compromise in achieving desired objectives. It is a vibrant and dynamic process that gives room for integrated and holistic governance; it possesses a mechanism that successfully manages conflicts and paves way for balance and harmony in different sectors (Robert, 1999:59, Stouffer, Opheim and Day, 1996:52; Derthick, 1992:121 in Ikelegbe, 2005).

The coronavirus pandemic has triggered an enormous shift in all spheres of life. The current reality in the Nigerian state beseeches swift response from the government to allay the fears of its people by introducing viable policies targeted at bringing respites. It is necessary to state that this challenge cannot be addressed in isolation and as such requires the combined efforts of all levels, organs, and agencies of government. This is a daunting task that requires the repositioning of intergovernmental relation systems in Nigeria as the present IGR system is ill-positioned to address these realities.

To properly chart the course to the path of recovery, deliberate efforts must be targeted at health, economy, education, security (of jobs and lives) as the implications of the virus have affected all spheres of life. The present condition however demands a viable solution that cuts across major sectors and levels of government at its barest minimum which can be better achieved through proper coordination between the levels of government in Nigeria as supported by Ikelegbe (2005) who pointed out that IGR will help foster

cooperative and collaborative response to challenges, provide support in form of resources to other levels for the execution of special projects and also create an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual sharing of expertise.

Successfully navigating the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria, in line with Ikelegbe (2005) would require deliberate coordination of efforts and resources between arms, levels, and actors in government, in addition to strategic collaborations and pooling of energy and skills in the management of scenarios and common developmental challenges. The aforementioned can only thrive on the strength of a purpose-driven intergovernmental relations understanding that the federal government cannot get the job done alone. Even the development of policies must factor in the peculiarities of the local context in which it is going to be implemented. The coronavirus pandemic has necessitated several centre-led interventions to various state governments targeted at successfully managing the situation at hand. Some states have displayed a cooperative relationship with the centre. For instance, Lagos State and Kano State have cooperated with the Federal Government, while some have put up some level of acrimonious disposition to the helping hand from the centre. Kogi State falls in this category. It is needless to say that such a display of discordance is capable of marring the vision of the Nigerian State to successfully manage the precarious situation. This is in line with Ikelegbe (2005) submission that harmonisation of governmental efforts can strengthen capacities, thereby providing quality services and solutions to a societal problem. This standpoint is an attestation that harmonious IGR is a necessity for successfully managing the pandemic and achieving good governance in Nigeria.

Another importance of IGR in successfully managing the pandemic can also be drawn from the reality of fiscal imbalance and inequality between units of government. There is a variance in the quality of response that can be accorded to the pandemic by the states in areas of health intervention, palliatives, intervention funds, economic stimulus packages, etc., which is a result of the difference in the economic conditions of the states. States like Lagos will have a robust managerial approach to the pandemic as a result of its economic viability than states like Borno or Benue. Buchanan and Flowers (1987) however averred that the aforementioned inequalities can be successfully cushioned by the centre, who can come in by providing

technical and professional assistance, palliatives, and intervention funds provided there exist vibrant and coordinated relationship between the units of government. Evidence of this can be seen in Kano State where the federal government had to provide health support considering the ineffectiveness of the state to properly curb the *Coronavirus* pandemic.

It is noteworthy that the pandemic has had a multiplier effect on the economy, thereby threatening the means of survival of several individuals as many jobs and businesses have been grounded. Several workers have been retrenched, some having to take a pay cut or proceed on furlough, etc. This demands that the government expedite action to ensure those who get spared by the infectious disease do not lose their lives to hunger. To address this will require a government-led coordinated approach involving stakeholders in the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Trade and Investment, working with the Central Bank of Nigeria and other commercial banks to ensure the availability of low-interest loans to businesses drastically affected by the pandemic to kick start and get back to operations. The federal government also has to work with the state and local governments to provide relief and support to those players in the informal sector, whose survival through daily income has been crippled as a result of the incessant lockdown. It is needless to say that the state governments will also have to rise to the occasion as the centre cannot do all of these alone. The local government is also the grassroots government and would be a viable implementing actor as a result of its closeness to the people. Also, a comprehensive and effective health intervention from the centre will require appropriate support from all levels of government. It is imperative to emphasise that the aforementioned cannot be achieved without a robust intergovernmental relation as these tasks require proper coordination between the levels of government and other stakeholders. In addition, the resultant effect of the pandemic can trigger security breaches as opportunists might take advantage of the situation by engaging in nefarious acts like theft, burglary, etc. hence, the government will have to work with its subnational units and relevant security agencies to help safeguard the lives and properties of its people. This position can also be strengthened by the presumptions of Ikelegbe (2005) that a federal state must leverage joint and harmonised efforts to properly respond to challenging situations. IGR can also help achieve multijurisdictional

decision-making with heavy reliance on government and non-governmental approaches in addressing the conditions precipitated by the pandemic (Akume, 2014).

Some key areas in which the values of IGR will be essential for the achievement of Nigeria's recovery goals in these perilous times as advanced by Akume (2014:173) includes "the prominence of policy network; inclusion of all concerned governmental entities in projects and programme implementation; attitudes and actions of implementing officials; the necessity of regular continuous interactions among policy implementers and monitoring officials, for example, the executive, bureaucrats, etc."

It is imperative to state that managing the pandemic in Nigeria is premised on cooperation and synergy between institutions as articulated by Aiyede (2004) that institutions are crucial in achieving and sustaining the visions of the federal project. Since an effective intergovernmental relation is a necessity for development and progress, it is then necessary for units and institutions of government to unite in achieving this feat. The harmonious relationship between the different levels and institutions of government will culminate into viable policies cutting across all aspects of life (economy, education, social, security, religion, and political) as it is evident that the pandemic has triggered huge distortions in the aforementioned areas.

Intergovernmental relations can also yield the desired results in tedious times when there is effective collaboration. It is needless to say that collaboration tends to be effective when involved parties have compatible goals carefully arrived at through a proper intergovernmental management system. Collaborations will be necessary for areas of resource allocation, programme planning, policy initiation, and programme implementation. These choices, when jointly arrived at, give all units and actors a sense of ownership, thereby buying their commitment to the implementation process (Ikelegbe, 2004; Aiyede, 2005 in Akume, 2014).

For intergovernmental relations to be effective in managing the pandemic in Nigeria, it is necessary to develop an intergovernmental relations management system (IGM) which will be useful in conflict management as conflict is inevitable in the relationship between levels of government. In line with this, Akume (2014) opined that IGR is an important but challenging process. It is cumbersome because of the presence of diverse groups having

different needs which can be conflicting as each unit represents its individually preferred interest with an unwillingness to compromise. The government is however in the place to capture those diverse interests into a united national action plan without deflating any group's values and interests. This will require the adoption of proper apparatus that will be able to address and manage the complexities that emanate from joint policy formulation and implementation. The device that makes the harmonisation of these interests possible is the intergovernmental management system embedded within the framework of IGR (Bassey, 2005 in Akume, 2014). Institutionalising a robust intergovernmental management system will help balance and align the diverse interests between heterogeneous groups. This can be achieved through compromise, bargaining, negotiation, consensus-building, and persuasion.

Conclusion

This study has revealed the precarious situation of IGR in Nigeria. It affirms that the present IGR system in Nigeria is not properly positioned to play the desired roles able to enhance survival during the coronavirus pandemic era. The acrimonious nature of IGR in Nigeria is linked to several contradictions and experiences, part of which is military rule which has marred the interactions between levels of government. IGR in Nigeria lacks ideology and orientation hence, the levels of government do not see their relationship as geared towards achieving desired goals. They rather see themselves as competing forces who desire to wield policies and resources for their selfish interests. The actors embedded in the union have an inimical aim of dominating and exerting influence over the others. The consequence is that the management of IGR remains poor, personalised, and rancorous, unable to promote good governance and development. It is important to clarify that the structures in IGR are not problematic, but the humans occupying the IGR structures are responsible for shaping and influencing the structures with their actions and attitudes.

There is a need for collaboration efforts between various governmental levels and agencies targeted at curbing the *Coronavirus* pandemic. This will require robust synergy of efforts and expertise by the various levels of government. This effort will be hindered in a situation where acrimonious

relationships exist between the various levels of government or agencies expected to come up with timely intervention necessary to curtail the menaces of COVID-19.

Recommendations

Effectively positioning IGR as a veritable tool for navigating the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria requires tinkering with the present IGR system in order to ensure that it is able to ensure COVID-19 recovery in Nigeria. The whole advocacy for true federalism should not be targeted at reducing the influence of the central government or any other level of government, considering the fact that all levels of government need each other to deliver services efficiently but should be premised on the need for true devolution of powers and responsibilities while leveraging on each units' comparative advantage to elicit the best out of the relationship. To further strengthen IGR in Nigeria, there is the need to establish a conflict resolution mechanism like the intergovernmental relations management system within the IGR framework to properly manage conflicting interests. Intergovernmental relations can also be strengthened by clearly defining the goals intended to be achieved by the state, making units understand their places as important stakeholders in achieving the stated goals, as well as the responsibilities each of the levels and the actors has to play. This will help reinforce the interest of the public realm over the private realm thus bringing the dividend to the citizenry. There is the need to rethink IGR so the interplay between units can be purpose-driven rather than merely fulfilling constitutional obligations and competing against each other. The units need to see their union as a system with each part having crucial roles to play for the success of the whole. Evidence has shown that political elites see intergovernmental relations as an avenue for party competition and this has been largely responsible for the weaknesses of the intergovernmental institutions; hence they need to play to the demands of federalism and ensure they align with the workings of the system for the achievement of stated goals. To successfully navigate the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria, all tiers and organs of government at the federal, state, and local levels, as well as all agencies and sectors (economy, education, religion, finance, security, agriculture, etc.), must be harmoniously engaged to achieve this feat.

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