

State Interference and Service Delivery in Nigeria's Local Government Administration: The Case of Ado Local Government Area, Ekiti State, 2011 – 2021

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ABSTRACT: *The establishment of local governments in Nigeria was motivated by the need for administrative convenience and development. The peculiarities of the grassroots government, according to efficiency service theorists, would engender national development. The purposes of the study, using mixed methods, were to investigate the challenge of state interference and the implications on service delivery in Ado Local Government Area, Ekiti State, Nigeria between 2011 – 2021. Primary data involved the use of online questionnaire and observation. The total of 103 respondents responded to the online questionnaires used for the analysis. Sources of secondary data include textbooks, reputable journals, and the internet. Primary data was analyzed statistically using frequencies, percentages and pie chart while content analysis was used for secondary data. The study discovers that state governments have been shortchanging local governments in Nigeria through their interference. The paper recommends political and financial autonomy for the local government to enhance sustainable development.*

KEYWORDS: efficiency, grassroots, grassroots development, national development, shortchanging

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of local government in any country of the world is to bring the government closer to the people at the grassroots in order to bring about effectiveness in governance and consequently overall development. Prominent among the roles of local government, according to Aleyomi (2013), is to use the funds made available by both federal and state with their internally generated revenue to improve the lives of people at the grassroots through initiating and implementation of developmental projects such as provision of access roads, water and rural electricity. Contrariwise, most local government in Nigeria are confronted with paucity of funds needed to implement their desired development projects at the grassroots of governance. Moreover, unhealthy interference in the affairs of the local government by the state government have further incapacitated effective functioning. This is evident in the imposition of loyalties of

the State as political representatives at the grassroots and the deprivation of local autonomy in the use of local funds. Musa & Ajibade (2016) noted that the State governments in Nigeria have hijacked the State Joint Local Government Account to starve local governments the needed funds for development.

Hence, there have been insignificant development at the local government level in Ekiti state since the creation of the State. Local areas in Ekiti State have been suffering from lack of infrastructure, Ado Ekiti Local Government inclusive. This is evidence in potholes laced local roads in almost every nook and crannies of the local government, poor rural electrification, lack of potable water and poor health centres facilities. The developmental failure, according to scholars, has been associated with political interference, lack of autonomy, corruption and mismanagement of funds, poor leadership, insufficient fund, lack of popular participation and poor implementation of policies, among others (Aleyomi, 2013, Adejojo, Akinsola, Arijeloye & Gabriel, 2017; Ajayi, 2011; Agagu, 2011). It is in this light that this study investigates the place of politics in the economy of the local government and the influence of economy on the politics of the grassroots. This study, therefore, examines State Interference and Service Delivery in Nigerian Local Government Administration: The Case of Ado Local Government Area, Ekiti State, 2011-2021. It specifically investigates factors responsible for the failure of governance at the grassroots, in spite of the huge statutory allocation accruing to it from federal government. It further examines the implications of the intervening factors on development.

Theoretical Framework

The study employs political economy approach. The approach was attributed to Adam Smith, David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill. Political economy, according to Frieden (2000), is about how politics affects the economy and the economy affects policies. "Political economists strive to identify relevant groups and their interests, and how the political institutions affect their impacts on policy" (Frieden, 2000). Political economy analysis, to Haider & Rao (2010) is concerned with "the interaction of political and economic processes in a society: the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, and the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time". Political economy approach explains how power and resources are shared and contested in the Local Government administration in Nigeria. It also reveals the underlying interests affecting development at the grassroots of governance. There is inseparable link in the administration of local government in Nigeria and the political class both at the state and local levels. Political interference not only manifest in recruitment of local government personnel but also in the formulation of and implementation of policies. Haider & Rao (2010) traced political economy analysis to 2000s when the technical manner of planning and implementation of policies based on expertise and aid failed to actualize the expected growth. Lack of the expected growth led to "an awareness among donors that politics, 'political will and local context matter to development" (Haider & Rao, 2010:4). The specific needs of the grassroots can be known better by the indigenes than the state government. Policies made and implemented with the support and cooperation of communities involved would produce better outcomes.

According to the Fritz (2012), political economy approach can enhance our understanding about the factors supporting and inhibiting better development outcomes. It would further help to focus on what could be done to strengthened the necessary drivers of progress. The issue of “who get what, when, and how” has been a major driver in the affairs of the grassroots government in Nigeria. This has gone further to dictate who represent the people at the local level, the allocation of resources and outcome of such practices. The interference of the state in the affairs of local government administration has been a major impediment to service delivery at the grassroots.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Local government, according the United Nations Documentary on Public Administration cited in Ola (1984:7) & Ajayi (2011:10), refers to

a political subdivision of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such an entity is elected or otherwise locally selected.

Agagu (2011) described local government as government at the grassroots level of administration meant for meeting peculiar grassroots needs of the people. From the above definitions, the features of local government include a recognizable political unit within definite territory, legal entity created by law, close to the grassroots, powers over people inhabiting its geographical terrain and the inhabitants of the local territory directly or indirectly participate in its government.

Aleyomi (2013) described the reasons for the creation of local government. According to him, local government was created to enable grassroots participation in politics through election process and decision making. He also identified administrative convenience as another purpose. He noted that the essence of local government is to give room for administrative practicality and suitability. He further revealed that the essence of local government creation is to provoke development through initiating and attracting projects to the local government, sustaining livelihoods through provision of credit facilities for agriculture, arts, crafts, and small-scale business. Local government, to him, is also to preserve the heritage and common interest of the people.

Mishael (2016) revealed lack of good governance at the local government administration in Nigeria. He noted the lack of transparency in dealing with critical political, economic, and administrative issues. He identified lack of transparency in service delivery and appointment to public positions. He submitted that accountability cannot be enforced without transparency. He further opined that appointment of people into local government and its commission adopts unfair and unethical patronage practices based on considerations and criteria devoid of merit.

Scholars have identified the challenges of local government administration in Nigeria. Alao, Osakede & Owolabi (2015) noted the single-tier uniform structure of local government in Nigeria to be unworkable for a local government with large population, considering the 1976 reform of

population between 150,000 – 800,000. They also pointed to the overbearing nature of State government over the local government, especially with the introduction of Joint Allocation Account. They further noted the overdependence of local government on federal allocation which often give room for paucity of funds at the local level of governance. There is consensus among scholars that corruption, in form of inflated contracts, ghost workers, falsification of documents, misappropriation of funds are major challenges to effective local government administration in Nigeria (Aleyomi, 2013; Alao, Osakede & Owolabi (2015; Mishael, 2016).

Adejo, Akinsola, Arijeloye & Gabriel, (2017) examined the causes and effects of termination of construction contracts in the 16 local government Areas in Ekiti State. They discovered lack of continuity, error in design, inadequate fund in the local government council, lack of prompt payment, unstable political leadership among others as factors for contract termination in the local government areas in Ekiti State. The implication of contract termination, according to them, include delayed completion of projects, abandonment of projects, and substandard quality projects.

Intergovernmental relations, according to Chukwuemeka & Aniche (2016), refers to interactions that takes place among different levels of government in the State. The relationship, according to them, is associated with federal system of government in which power is shared between the federal, central or national level and the major sub units as spelt out of the constitution. In Nigeria, the power of government is shared between the Federal, State and Local governments. The interactions include Federal-State, Federal-State-Local, and State-Local interactions. On the other hand, Adedire (2014) & Ijimakinwa, Zinsu & Osakede (2015) revealed three dimensions or schools of thought on intergovernmental relations. They include the school who believe that intergovernmental relations exist in federal system of government while the second school of thought believe that both federal and unitary system practice intergovernmental relations and the third school noted that it can take place at the international level. They identified the intergovernmental relationship in Nigeria to include constitutional, political, financial, administrative and judicial relationships. They, however, noted that intergovernmental relationship in Nigeria is characterized with reluctant cooperation and competition. They also revealed unhealthy relationship between levels of government in Nigeria. The unhealthy relationships, according to them, include revenue sharing challenges, overconcentration of power, illegal removal of local government officials and the constitutional status of local government. They concluded that the autonomy of local government is questionable due to the ambiguity of the constitution. The overpowering influence of state government on the local governments in Nigeria has been a major clog in the wheel of progress of the grassroots of governance. The interference cut across the political and financial administration of the local governments. It can be deduced from the above that there is need for healthy relationship between the State and Local government levels to enhance the potentials of the grassroots administration for effective service delivery.

METHODOLOGY

Mixed method was used to elicit data on the political economy of local government administration, using Ado Ekiti Local Government Area as a case study. Ado Ekiti doubled as a local government area as well the capital of Ekiti State located in the Southwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The population of Ado Ekiti Local Government Area as at 2006 Population census was 313,690 (City Population, 2020; Manpower, 2022). Ado Local Government Area was purposively selected considering its double position as a Local Government Area and also as the capital of Ekiti State. Primary data was collected through online questionnaire from residents of Ado Local Government Area of Ekiti State. The sample population for the study include 103 residents from various areas including Adebayo, Oke-ila, Opopogbooro, Olorunsogo/Olorunda, Oshodi, Omisanjanna, Odo-Ado, Ureje and Basiri. Ado Local Government Area was purposively selected considering its double position as a Local Government Area and also as the capital of Ekiti State. The sample areas were choosing with simple random sampling while the respondents were randomly selected from the chosen areas. Fifty-four (54) males and 49 females voluntarily participated while their age ranges were 18 – 25 (1.9%), 26-45 (51.5%), 46-60 (40.8%) and 60-above (5.8%). Occupation of respondents include civil servants, public servants, traders/businessmen/women, artisans and farmers. Secondary data were retrieved from textbooks, reputable journals, Newspapers, and the internet. Primary data were analysed with the statistical tools such as frequency, simple percentages and pie chart while secondary data were descriptively analysed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Below is the presentation and discussion of the data gathered. The creation of local is to enable the grassroots to fill the impulse of government through effective service delivery. However, the effectiveness of local government in service delivery in Nigeria has been hindered by state interference in the politics and administration of the grassroots. The study investigates the factors obstructing service delivery and development in Ado Local Government, Ekiti State Nigeria. Respondents were made to respond to structured questionnaire with the option of “Agree”, “Disagree” and “I don’t know”.

Awareness of the Populace on the Purpose of Local Government

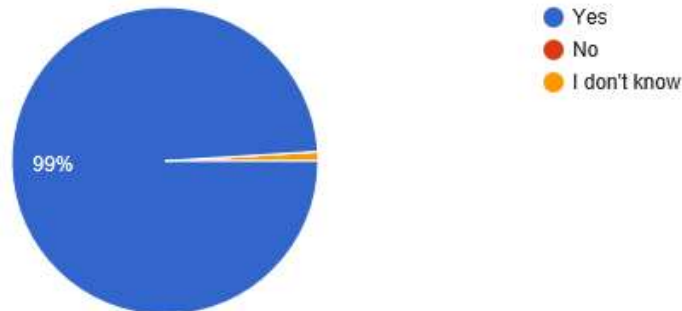


Figure 1. Awareness of the purpose of Local Government

Source: Field Work, 2022

Almost all respondents, 99% are aware that local government exist to draw government closer to the people at the grassroots and to make people feel the impulse of government while just 1% is unaware. This indicates that local government is not a hidden institution, citizens at the grassroots are aware of its existence and expect much from the it.

The Challenges of Local Government Administration in Ado Ekiti Local Government Area

Most of the respondents 87.1% opined that the choice of representatives at the local government level (in practical terms) has become an imposition. Only 4% have contrary opinion while 8.9% said they did not know. This is in line with the finding of Aroh (2020) that, formerly, winning was in the hands of the people unlike the modern day when councillorship is by selection. Similarly, Awotokun (2014) submitted that electoral process at the local government level has been highly commercialized and occupied by highest bidders. He further noted that introduction of capital has alienated bona fide members of the community from contesting for legislative and executive positions while immigrants from the city who only claim that the rural communities were their ancestral homes.

Majority of the respondents 88.2% revealed that inputs are rarely taken from citizens into government policies at the grassroots while 7.8% said “No” and 3.9% said they did not know. This finding is corroborated by Onuh cited in (Aroh, 2020), who opined that legislative business is carried out at Chairman’s residence because they are not directly elected by their constituencies.

In line with the above, 78.4% respondents revealed that projects at the local level are imposition of government while 14.7% have contrary opinion and 6.9% claimed ignorance. According to Kinyata & Abiodun (2020), members of community should be allowed to participate in developmental projects from planning to execution rather that imposing on them. They submitted

that the bottom-up approach will yield better developmental results with inadequate resources and the increasing needs at the grassroots. The benefits, according to them include better designed projects, better targeted benefits, more cost effective, more equitable distribution of projects benefits, less corruption, and improvement in the match of what a community needs and what it obtains.

Similarly, most respondents 94.1% are of the opinion that State Government has hijacked some of the roles of local government, for instance, establishment of markets. Only 4.9 did not support that State has hijacked some of the roles of local government while 1% claimed ignorance. This finding was corroborated by the position of community leaders in Ekiti and Osun State on the near hijack of statutory functions of local government by the states (The Guardian, 2017). They submitted that the act “is seriously hampering concrete development efforts at the local level” (The Guardian, 2017).

Findings also showed that politics and administration at the grassroots of governance are affected by political interference. Almost all respondents, 95.1% agreed that politics and administration at local government are influenced by political interference. Just 1.9% had contrary opinion and 2.9% claimed ignorance. Similar finding by Zoaka, Collins & Jacob (2017) revealed that local governments in majority of states in Nigeria are under the stranglehold of governors or their agents. Such agents according to them include Commissioners for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs or Local Government Service Commission, and the State Joint Local Government Account Committees (SJLGA).

The major view on the place of corruption in the development at the grassroots revealed that progress at the local government have been affected by corruption. Majority of the respondents, 91.3% opined that corruption is a major factor obstructing progress at the local government. Only 2.9% respondents did not support the claim while 5.8% were not sure if progress at the local government have been affected by corruption. Obasanjo noted the failure of local government system to achieve the rapid and sustained development expected as a result of huge fund accruing to the grassroots from federal account (Vambe, 2018).

It was also discovered that misappropriation of funds by politicians is one of the obstacles to development at the grassroots level. Most respondents, 93.2% agreed that misappropriation of funds by politicians is one of the obstacles to development at the grassroots level while 2.9% disagreed and 3.9% were undecided. Zoaka & Collins (2017) described the place of local governments as stooges to represent the elites at the state level who award contracts, projects and siphon funds meant for local governments.

Furthermore, majority of the respondents 89.3% submitted that political representatives are more loyal to the State than to the people. Just 5.8% had contrary opinion while 4.9% were not sure. The President of National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) in Ekiti State noted that the control of local governments by the State Government has robbed the people of accountability

(Agbedo, Awodipe, Diamond, Udejah, Ahovi, Nzeagwu, Afolabi, Agbor, Todo, & Ogugbuaja, 2021).

From the findings above, it can be deduced that service delivery and development at the local government has been incapacitated by the following factors: imposition of candidates by the state government, failure to take inputs from the local populace, imposition of projects on the local governments, state government hijacking some local government roles, political interference in politics and administration of the local governments, corruption and misappropriation of funds by politicians and loyalty of local representatives to the state government at the expense of the local populace.

The implications of the intervening factors on development

Findings revealed that lack of autonomy has drawn back the wheel of development at the local level. The popular response, 90.2% respondents showed that lack of autonomy has drawn back the wheel of development at the local level, just 4.9% respondents disagreed while 4.9% claimed ignorance. Vambe (2018) submitted that the nature intergovernmental relations between State and Local governments is more or less master-servant relationship in which the local government subsists at the mercy of the state government. He noted that the administration at the local governments is being directed by the state in relation to social and economic matters.

It was also reflected from findings that the State Joint Local Government Account is an obstruction to development at the local level of government. Many of the respondents, 78.6% were of this opinion while 11.7% disagreed and 9.7% said they did not know. The findings of Zoaka & Collins (2017) supported the claim that State Joint Local Government Account compounded the influence of the State on availability of funds for local governments to carry out their projects and programmes.

In line with the above, the general believe from findings is that State government derive benefits from the local government than the citizens at the grassroots. Majority of the respondents, 88.2% were of the opinion that State government derive benefits from the local government than the citizens at the grassroots while just 2% disagreed and 9.8% said they did not know. In line with the above finding, many scholars are of the opinion that local government fail in the area of effective service delivery as a result of the roles of State government in taking over their financial allocation, taxes and other funding (Vambe, 2018).

There is a consensus among respondents that local government has been turned to an extension of State administration due to its domination and undue control over the local government administration. This assertion was confirmed by 93.1% respondents while 2.9% disagreed and 3.9% claimed ignorance. This is reflected in the appointment of political representatives, decision making and its implementation. This is corroborated by Aroh (2020) citing Onuh that councilors are appendages of repressive government serving as warrant chiefs which has been worsened by modern day politics of godfatherism. The councilors are believed to hardly take any decision or

legislation that is contrary to the wish of their godfathers. Musa & Ajibade (2016) submitted that State Governors, capitalizing on constitutional provision to conduct elections into local government councils, have reduced local government to mere extension of their political and administrative domain.

Findings revealed that political representatives at the local level are loyalists of State government than being genuine representatives of the grassroots. Most of the respondents, 90.2% agreed to this assertion while only 6.9% had contrary opinion and 2.9% said they did not know. The implication of this is that the political representatives lack the interest of the masses as their primary interest, rather they see themselves as accountable to the power that enthroned them. This is in line with the submission of the President of National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) in Ekiti State who revealed that the people at the local areas in Ekiti were grievously affected and the grassroots undeveloped as a result of the chairman and councilors who appear as puppets of state government (Agbedo, Awodipe, Diamond, Udejah, Ahovi, Nzeagwu, Afolabi, Agbor, Todo, & Ogugbuaja, 2021).

The implication of being “anointed” of the State power at the local government level make political officeholders to be more interested in what will accrue to their personal purse than the development of their local areas. Majority of the respondents, 92.2% supported this assertion while 3.9% disagreed and 3.9% said they did not know. This was corroborated by the findings of Zoaka & Collins (2017) that Caretaker Committees who are planted by State Government do divert local government funds to personal purse thereby truncating development at the grassroots.

The extended practice of seeing political office as means for personal enrichment gives room for given contracts out to political beneficiaries which often result to substandard project. Findings from 94.1% respondents revealed this assertion while just 1% disagreed and 4.9% claimed ignorance. Boris (2015) posited that corruption and ineffective use of the scarce resources at the grassroots by the political officeholders have resulted in inflated, abandoned, or substandard projects.

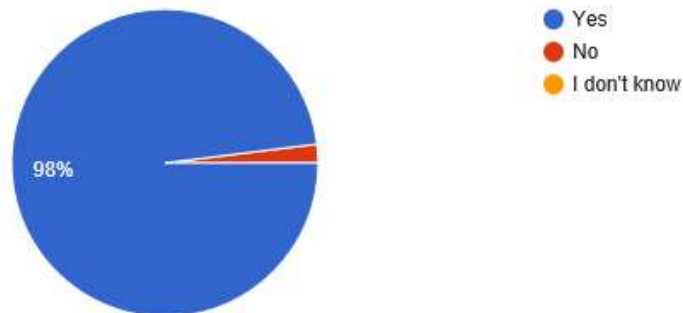


Figure 2. Most local roads are in bad condition, laced with potholes

Source: Field Work, 2022

The most visible indices of lack of development at the local government level is evidence in bad condition of local roads, laced with potholes at almost every nook and crannies of the local government areas. The figure 2 above showed that all respondents 198%, except 2% who opined contrary, agreed that most local roads in Ado Local Government Areas are in bad condition, laced with potholes. Boris (2015:16) revealed that provision and maintenance of roads and public utility at the local governments have become a “myth and a mirage”. Ezeagu & Ezema (2022:65) attributed bad roads to “poor design and construction, ... poor maintenance culture, poor highway facilities, use of low quality materials, use of untrained workers, insufficient supervision, ... non-involvement of professional bodies in highway design, construction and maintenance.”

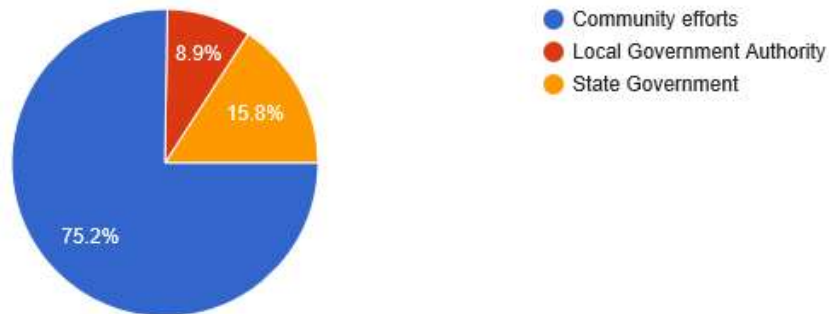


Figure 3. Grading of roads

Source: Field Work, 2022

Similarly, findings revealed that maintenance of local roads in form of grading were done majorly through community efforts. From the findings in figure 3 above, most of the respondents 75.2% revealed that grading of local roads were done by community efforts while 8.9% noted that their roads were graded by Local Authority and 15.8% said their roads were graded by the State Government. It is clearly apparent that local government have failed in the performance of its primary duty. Most roads are graded by through community efforts and in some cases by State Government, as in the case of 1km roads in each local government in Ekiti State. Odewale (2020) opined that most of Nigerian local government roads lack proper maintenance culture and the government may not pay attention until such roads are devastated.

Another identified effect of ineffective leadership, brought about by political imposition and interference, is poor implementation of policy which also hinder development. Most respondents, 96.1% agreed that poor policy implementation due to ineffective leadership has hindered development at the grassroots. Only 1% respondent disagreed while 2.9% said they did not know. This finding was in line with the findings of Boris (2015) who noted high degree of external influence and interference in local government affairs especially by State Governments.

There is a consensus among respondents that progress at the local government level have been obstructed by corruption. This assertion was supported by 91.3% respondents while just 2.9% disagreed and 5.8% claimed ignorance. Adebayo (2014) noted corruption as a great threat to rural development which manifesting in lack of integrity, accountability and transparency on the part of people to implement developmental projects.

This study, according to the findings above, discovered that undue interference by state government in the administration of local government has constituted an obstruction to service delivery and development at the grassroots. Lack of autonomy in financial matters due to the Joint State-Local Government Account and appointment of state loyalties as representatives at the local levels has turned the grassroots to an extension of state government. Furthermore, local representatives who are ‘anointed’ of the state government and unaccountable to the populace seize their opportunity to acquire wealth at the expense of local development. Also, contracts are awarded to political opportunists who often end up delivering substandard or incomplete projects.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examines the intervening factors obstructing development at the local government level, using Ado Ekiti Local Government Area as a case study. The factors include imposition of Chairman/Councilors, lack of popular participation/imposition of projects, hijack of local government roles by the State, State Joint Local Government Account, political interference, loyalty of local representatives to the State, misappropriation of funds and corruption by political office holders. It also investigates the implication of the intervening factors on development, which include poor implementation of policy due to poor leadership, inability to meet local needs due to imposition, lack of progress at the local level, substandard projects, lack of accountability, embezzlement, and misappropriation of public funds, diversion of local government funds by State and local government representative. The position of the study is that state governments have been shortchanging local government administration in Nigeria. The overall effect is underdevelopment at the grassroots which also affect national development. The study, therefore, recommends the following:

- i. Autonomy should be granted to the local government. Political and economic freedom should be allowed to enable local government to democratically elect their representative from people they know, who would be accountable to them and not to the State. Imposition should be disallowed.
- ii. There should be room for popular participation in decision making. This would enhance decision that meet the needs of the populace instead of imposition that do not address their priorities.
- iii. Allocation from the federal government should be given directly to local Government while the joint account with the state should be cancelled. This would enable the local representatives to channel the funds appropriately to their unique needs and also give room for accountability.

- iv. There should be stern punishment for embezzlement and diversion of local government funds. Properties acquired through corruption should be confiscated to serve as deterrent to others.
- v. Due process should be followed in award of contracts. There should be close monitoring of projects by both community's representatives and local government officials. This would enhance quality delivery of local projects.
- vi. There should be regular and effective means of accountability on the part of political representatives to the people at the grassroots. Chairman and councilors should hold regular meetings to give feedbacks of their performances and also to take inputs from the people.

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