

DECISION-MAKING IN NIGERIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: THE ROLE OF APPOINTED OFFICERS

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Discussion on the role of local governments in the Nigerian Federal set-up has tended to consider them as merely dispensers of services for the State and the Federal Governments.¹ The argument has always been that local governments could not be regarded as autonomous decision-making entities since they depend on Federal and State Governments for their finance. Even if it is true that the discretion allowed to local government is less when much of its finance comes from superior governments,² this does not prevent local governments from taking decisions which we can refer to here as typically local. This is evidenced in the way certain local government councils bypassed, in 1988, the Federal Government directive limiting the total cost of contracts the Chairman could award at one go to N50,000:00. Local governments may be drowned in the enormous directives from both State and Federal Governments, but there is a little margin, left mainly as a result of local differences, which allows these councils to adapt such directives to their respective situation. A current example is the implementation of the Federal decree on primary education. It would be inaccurate to think, for example, that local governments, despite the national character of the policy, have the same approach to primary education.

What we actually intend to do in this paper is to take a look at the decision-making process in Nigerian local governments with the ultimate aim of analyzing the role of local government officers. The methodological approach to such studies have changed from the weberian ideal model. According to Suleiman, "the view that a number of scholars... now take is that *ideal type* Weberian formulation ought simply to serve as a backdrop to the analysis of the relation between administration and politics. Hence, the central questions become: What is the degree of influence that civil servants exert on the political process? How is this influence exercised? And finally, what are the effects of bureaucratic influence on politics?"³. As far as we are concerned,

the major questions that will guide this paper are, how far do officers influence decision-making process? And what circumstances have encouraged or discouraged this influence?

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the interpretation of the questionnaire which we administered in three local governments on decision-making and the role of different actors; the second treats the type of relation that exists between officers and councillors; in the last section, we try to analyze the conditions that have favoured increased officer participation in the decision-making process.

METHOD FOR THE STUDY

The material for this study came from two principal sources: firstly, from a questionnaire which we distributed to senior officers in three local governments in the country. This allowed us to gain access to personal informations concerning them; their ages, grades, educational qualifications, etc. This preliminary survey helped in constituting our second source, which is personal interviews. We interviewed at least three councillors in each of the councils. Suffice to say that these councillors were those appointed between December 1989 and January 1990 and who were in office till December 1990.

The interviews were conducted following a set of prepared questions based on the objectives which we had fixed, especially that relating to the influence of local government officers on the decision-making processes.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND THE ROLE OF DIFFERENT ACTORS: INTERPRETATION OF INFORMATIONS FROM OUR QUESTIONNAIRE

In our interpretation of decision-making in these local governments, we have decided, for analytical purposes, to reduce decision-making function to five stages which we are going to present briefly.

a) Identification of a problem and its inscription on the agenda.

The decisional machine at the local level can not be triggered off until there is a problem to solve or a national or State directive to implement locally. As soon as it is established that there is a problem to solve, the decisional machine starts with the inscription of the problem on the agenda of the council.

b) Elaboration of the problem.

This is the stage where all information concerning the problem are gathered. The decision makers try to see either among themselves or separately the most efficient means of solving the problem. An evaluation of all available informations are carried out. At this stage, the target group ought to be informed so as to prevent any hostile reaction when the decision is finally taken. It should also be stated that a political or administrative decision can, but satisfy a part of the population. It is also at this stage that experts are invited to give their opinions, to measure the costs and benefits of each available option.

c) Decision-taking stage.

The third state is where the decision is actually taken. After all the informations collected in the second stage have been treated, the cost and benefit of each action considered, what is left for the decision makers to do is to make a choice. The choice made may not definitely be the best, but the one they feel will most satisfy at that particular time.

d) Implementation of the decision taken.

A decision is always followed by an order to carry it out. Implementation means making available the necessary financial and human resources. A decision maker who thinks his work is over after taking a decision is mistaken because it is necessary to follow up to the implementation level to see how this is carried out, so as to familiarize the people concerned by the decision with its progress. This is the stage where one sees some determined decision

makers who follow their projects to the last stage to ensure that nothing is changed from the original conception by the administrative officers.

e) Evaluation of the decision.

This is the stage where a decision is re-examined to see if it has achieved its original aim. This stage allows the decision maker to appreciate the impact of the policy and the necessity, if need be, to modify or change it completely.

We should state here that all decisions don't strictly follow these stages. At times it is the structure of the decision that determines where to start from.

We are going to interpret our data following the five stages enumerated above. Our initial concern was to find out if the three local governments were at the period of our research carrying out new projects. We discovered that each of them had different projects like construction of roads, electrification of some rural communities, construction of markets, of a stadium and the building of the local government office annexes. What is next is to find out how these projects generated.

Since the first stage in decision-making process is the inscription on the agenda, the officers were asked in the questionnaire to say where ideas about new projects emanate from, that is, who determines when there is a problem to solve. We had the following results: Federal Government 8.3%, State Government 13.3%, Ministry of Local Government 6.7%, traditional chiefs 8.5%, Chairman/Sole Administrator 11.7%, Secretary/Head of Departments 20.0%, Councillors 15.0% members of committees 10%, others 6.7%.

These responses gathered from officers show the importance of the Secretary and his HODs 15%, followed by the councillors 15%, the State Government 13.3% and the Chairman who has just 11.7% more detailed analysis of each of the local government show different trends. In one, the officers believe that ideas could come from all the actors mentioned with the exception of the Ministry of Local Government. Traditional Chiefs obtained up to 50% in that local government. In another local government, the actor that was most cited was the Federal Government 20%, State Government 30%, Ministry of Local Government 20% and the Councillors 30%. What is really surprising in this

local government is the exemption of traditional chiefs, the Secretary/HODs and the Chairman from those who initiate ideas at the local level. In the last local government, internal actors are more frequent. Effectively, apart from the 10% for the State government, we have 10% for the Chairman, 50% for the Secretary/HOD, 10% for councillors and 2% for members of committees.

The responses that came more frequently from the officers of the three local government areas, even though with little variations, are the State governments, the councillors and the members of committees. Let us try to explain why this is so. The fact the State government occupy such a position should not be a surprise. We know the type of relation that exist between State and local governments. This relation which is now institutionalized in the Constitution of the Third Republic gives local governments participatory role in the administration of the State in respect of primary education, adult education, agriculture and natural resources, the provision of health services and any other function from the House of Assembly of the State⁵.

As for the role of councillors and committee members, we can say grossly that local government officers accept the fact that the former are responsible for the political control of local governments. Nonetheless, we tried to see if the councillors, appointed by the State government, see themselves more as State representatives or representatives of the local population. The question was, "which of these two propositions define your role as a councillor?"

- i) Supervise the directives given by the Federal or State government; or
- ii) Take decisions that benefit the people I am to serve?

All the councillors interviewed believed they were there to fulfil the two functions. This in a way justify the response of the officers as regards the role of councillors in determining if there is need for a decision.

We, after that, asked the officers "who suggests the alternatives to be considered to carry out new projects?" The over all response from the three local governments showed the Chairman 30%, the Secretary/HODs 33.3% and the councillors 18.3%. What is surprising in these results is the fact that in one of the local governments, councillors, councillors and committee members were excluded while in the other two they gathered 24.6% of the

results. The traditional chiefs were not cited at all. This means that while they could suggest projects for the councils, they are not consulted when it comes to taking decisions. It is important to state that the Secretary/HODs have up to 55% in one local government and 30% and 15% in the other two. As for the Chairman, the percentage is identical (30%) in the three local governments.

Our next stage was to find out who exercises more influence over decisions, secretary, treasurer, councillors, traditional chiefs, members of committees, political parties and others. The results we had showed the domination of the political branch over the administrative section in decision-making. In the three local governments, 35% of officers think it is the Chairman that is more influential, 18.3% think it is the councillors and 16.7%, the committee members. Since the three of them belong to the political branch of local administration, it means that 80% of officers think that the elected/nominated members exercise more influence on decisions. This response seems to confirm the statutory dispositions which give the council the final power over local government decisions. But if we look at the way the Chairman of councils were appointed when we were doing our field work, this result could be misleading. the Chairmen at that time were appointed by State governments from State Ministries. They were senior executive officers posted from the State Civil Service. In that wise, one could not actually say that they belong to the political branch of the local government because most of the time they are forced because of their origin to subordinate local priorities. They consult the State capital for directives more than an elected local government Chairman would have done. This does not neglect the fact that councillors exercise a lot of influence on council decisions because, excluding the Chairman, councillors and committee members have a support rate of 45%.

During our interviews with councillors, we asked them to describe how decisions are arrived at in their councils and their participation. The following extracts from their responses show the level of participation of councillors.

Most of the time, I am informed by the chief engineer of the need to carry out a project. We discuss it together and when we agree, I note it down. I then present the idea to the Finance and General Purpose Committee which eventually decides. (*Supervisory Councillor of Works*).

You know, the officers know where the schools are located and their problems. Me, I am new here. they (officers) come to my office, we talk about what they feel it is necessary to do and we decide together the priorities. But normally I give the last word. (*Supervisory Councillor of Education*)

Its me who make the list of all the problems in the department. But the Ministry of Health too sends us some directives which we are obliged to follow. If not, its me. (*Supervisory Councillor for Health*)

As for me when I want something to be done in my department, I go directly to the Chairman. Its been long that I have been in the health sector. I was a Nurse for about 30 years before I retired. So, if the Chairman is OK, we discuss it in the general meeting. (*Supervisory Councillor for Health*)

Broadly speaking, all the councillors interviewed, except one who thought there were too many compulsory directives from the higher levels, thought their participation in decision-making was prominent. None of them wanted any change from the way it is done.

As regards the role of councillors and officers in the implementation processes, the officers disagreed on what should be their respective roles. We asked the officers, "after decisions are taken are you left to carry them out without supervision by councillors/committee members? If *yes*, do you think it is normal? If *no*, do you think you should be supervised? 66.7% of officers answered *yes* as against 33.3% *no*. For those who answered *yes*, some of their reasons are quoted below:

"If the person is a senior officer, it means he is competent".

"Yes, because we are responsible employees".

"Its normal because they (the councillors) know that we are competent".

"They should be confident in us to carry out our mission without supervision".

The 33.3% who thought they should be supervised gave democratic reasons like the responsibility of the councillors towards the people if a particular policy does not work.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COUNCILLORS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICERS

In the following section, we are going to look at the type of relation that exist between councillors and officers. To discuss the relation between the *joint elite*⁶ within the *parallel structures*⁷ of Nigerian local governments will drive us into the old debate over policy and administration. Talking about this relationship, Francis de Basque and Jean-Louis Quermonne⁸ remark: "Administration and politics! Two different figures show the possible relations between the couple. Either they live separately, and as such, in the first instance respect, the norm. Then there won't be the need to talk about it because it is the general belief that administration must stay out of politics. Or they live together, no matter the form of their cohabitation, the liaison becomes immediately polemical".

A lot has been written on the relation between policy and administration. To be able to review some of these literatures, we are going to use the four models outlined by James Svava⁹ namely, the Policy-Administration Dichotomy Model, the Mixture in Policy Model, the Mixture in Administration Model and the Elected Official-Administrator as Co-Equals in Policy Model.

(a) The Policy-Administration Dichotomy Model.

The first literature on the relation between policy and administration supported the Weberian model of strict separation between administrative and political functions. According to this model, administrative officers should carry out their functions without resentment. The first step towards this distinction was the article of Woodrow Wilson published in 1887¹⁰ in which he stated that "Administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administration questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices..." It is along the same line that Frank Goodnow¹¹ argued that "there

are (...) in all governmental systems, two primary or ultimate functions of government, viz the expression of the will of the State and the execution of that will. There are also in all States separate organs each of which is mainly busied with the discharge of one of these functions. These functions are respectively politics and administration". This type of thinking that dominated for a long time made the democratic control of government possible and it exonerated officers from blames over their actions. Thus, it was the belief that policies are made by elected officials for administrative officers.

This strict separation which was meant to insulate government from politics and prevent corruption and inefficiency was never the case. It is this that explain the existence of the three models that follow.

(b) The Mixture in Policy Model.

This model which also isolate administration from policy gave an important role to the former in the formulation of policies. Easton¹², for example, defines politics as a distributional process in which judges, legislators, administrators, among others, make value choices and allocate resources. This model believes that "administrators have extensive opportunity to set policy—initiating proposals, exercising discretion, manipulating expertise, writing budgets, and determining the delivery of services—and through implementation they shape policy formulated by elected officials."¹³

(c) The Mixture in Administration Model.

This is an antithesis to the former model. In this model, emphasis is placed on the role of legislators in what is known traditionally as administrative sphere such as influence over recruitment or the award of contract.

(d) The Elected Official—Administrator as Co-Equals in Policy Model.

This model, while sharing many of the characteristics of the *policy mixture* model, adds a normative dimension. The model "asserts and ethical obligation of administrators to promote the values of equity and participation and to oppose actions by elected officials which would be adverse to the interests of the politically powerless".¹⁴ This is a sharp break from the policy

administration dichotomy because administrators are urged to construct mechanisms for policy making and administration which bypass elected officials and establish direct linkages between governmental staff and the public.¹⁵

It is from these models that Svava constructed a new model which we think will serve us in analyzing the relation between councillors and officers in Nigeria. According to him, the functions of government can be divided into four instead of the usual two, policy and administration. While the former can be divided into policy and mission, the later becomes administration and management. And so "whereas the responsibility for the extreme functions of mission and management is largely dichotomized, responsibility for policy and administration is shared and the activities themselves are difficult to separate".¹⁶

We are going to examine the relationship between councillors and officers in Nigerian local government councils following the four functions, starting from the function of mission.

By mission¹⁷, he refers to the organization's philosophy, its thrust, the broad goals it sets for itself, and things it chooses not to do. This, according to him, is the responsibility of elected representatives if we follow the normative requirement of democratic theory, although there may be exceptions.

In the Nigerian case, the philosophy and objectives of local governments are fixed by various State and Federal government decrees. Their functions are listed in the Constitution, which means that neither the councillors nor the officers could remove or add to it. Although the councillors we interviewed thought they were not only there to ratify State or Federal government's decision. This may be different during a civilian regime with the party in power at the local level trying to implement its electoral promises.

On the other hand, as for policy defined as middle-range policy decisions for example, how to spend government revenues, whether to initiate new programmes or create new offices, and how to distribute services at what levels within the existing range of services provided, it is common to see interaction between the two because administrators give advice and make

recommendations to elected officials. We have mentioned it earlier on that both councillors and officers participate in the initiation of new programmes. 36.7% of the respondents thought the initiatives come from councillors as against 20% for the officers. As for who suggests the alternatives to consider in decision-making, 56.6% of respondents viewed the councillors as being responsible against 33.3% for the officers.

However, things are not as simple as it is presented in percentages. We saw different areas of divergence in the points of views of both councillors and officers. In the three local governments, 22% of officers admitted they have, at one time or the other, had problems with councillors in the course of exercising their functions. One officer in the Education Department of a local government told us how councillors chose to construct culverts instead of buying school materials for pupils in a primary School. He thought that option was taken because of the fall back they will get from the contract.

Administration refers to the specific decisions, regulations, and practices employed to achieve policy objectives. This is an area that is normally reserved to the bureaucracy. But intervention of elected officials is noticed in the specification of techniques to be employed implementing decisions by legislators, intervention in-service delivery, and legislative oversight. In Nigeria, the relation when it comes to overseeing or supervising administrators while implementing decisions depends on individual councillors. A councillor told us why he suddenly became interested in administrative work. At times decisions are not correctly carried out, he said.

Finally, as regards management, that is, the actions taken to support the policy and administrative functions (controlling and utilizing the human, material and informational resources of the organization to best advantage), it is, according to Svara, the province of the manager. The council is, however, involved in this sphere to some extent. Senior local government workers in Nigeria are hired by the Local Government Service Commission, with the exception of the Secretary since 1991. Before the recent changes, local government workers, especially the senior officers considered themselves more of State workers since they can only be disciplined at that level. With the new development, things might change (unfortunately, we don't have enough evidence to judge the situation). As for informational resources, we are going

to discuss that in our next section. The Secretary, just like the manager in the Council-Manager system, has more control in management functions. But the new link which he now has with the Chairman—the Chairman appoints his Secretary now—might increase the involvement of elected officials in management functions.

The relation between officers and councillors could also be noted in the daily contacts they have. We discovered from our interviews with councillors that they try as much as possible to see their HODs everyday. This, according to a councillor, "allows him to know how far they have gone in the implementation of the department's programmes". This contact is even more personal in some local governments, especially where the HOD and the supervisory councillor shares the same office.

The daily contacts also help in discussing policy issues in some local governments. 80% of councillors contact their officers before taking certain decisions. We also discovered that some councillors prefer to keep off their officers by not opening up because they regard them as being too cumbersome.

We also asked both councillors and officers to say if they have different perceptions of local policies. The councillors in their majority felt there was no difference except in spending. Officers try to prevent them from spending. As for officers they believed that their perception of policies is the same with that of councillors, when they are appointed by the Military and not different from when they are elected under the banner of political parties. This explains why a lot of officers prefer their work under a military regime.

What role do officers feel they should perform in local administration in general and in decision-making in particular? 77.8% of officers felt they are there to serve the local government by their advice and help towards local development, while the remaining thought their role as officers is to carry out the decisions of the council without asking questions. This shows some divergence in the way local government officers see their work. This may be due to the impression they have of councillors or to the local government set-up in Nigeria which has excluded, more of the time, elected councillors for appointed civil servants.

OFFICERS IN DECISION-MAKING, ADVANTAGES, RESOURCES, AND CONSTRAINTS

We have been trying in the preceding sections to show that officers participate actively in the decision-making processes of local governments in Nigeria. We have shown too that this participation spreads from the formulation of decisions to their implementation. However, this participation varies under certain conditions. In this section, we would try to see the conditions that have helped local government officers in accruing so much importance in decision-making. At the same time we are going to see the measures taken by the central government to put a check to this bureaucratic control.

Most researchers who talk of bureaucratic control justify their stand with three major arguments: expertise of officers, the time they spend in their functions and their experience in their jobs. It is according to these reasonings that we are going to analyze the influence of local government officers.

The first condition that favour officers in decision-making was the arrival of the military in the national political set-up. The first measure taken by the military after the coup d'etat of 1966 was to ban political parties and their activities, without installing another form of institution to control the bureaucracy at national, State and local levels. This made it possible for civil servants to take over political power.¹⁸ This is why Bienen and Fitton¹⁹ concluded that "the civil service has been seen as a net gainer from military rule in Africa. It is said that civil servants are glad to be free of political interference in their day-to-day work".

When the military got to power, the system of Sole Administrator was introduced. The Sole Administrator who is a State civil servant combines both political and administrative functions. Apart from carrying out personally the functions of the council, he supervises its officers and takes decisions on any matter concerning the council and its workers.²⁰

With this system, there is no difference between administration and policy. Decision-making is highly administrative or bureaucratic because all the functions of the councillors and the Chairman have become those of the Sole Administrator and the officers. The Secretaries of local governments too

accumulated more powers in decision-making since most of them, in the administrative hierarchy, are on the same level with the Sole Administrators. Besides, because of their knowledge in local administration, the Sole Administrators depend on them for advice before taking certain decisions.

This type of privilege could hardly be got under a civilian regime. The case of Warri Local Government during the Second Republic as described by Oun²¹ demonstrates this. According to him, most decisions were taken without passing through the normal processes. Officers were only used by councillors to achieve party objectives. Councillors were even interfering in small administrative problems. He confirmed that many decisions were arrived at in party meetings. The local government had a Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) majority.

This showed how the presence of a well organized political party could modify or control the influence of officers in decision-making. But political parties are not stable participants in the Nigerian political system as a result of recurrent military interventions. This situation made the officers to carry out functions that are traditionally those of councillors. This is what Michael Hill called *administrative politics*.²²

When we did our research, political parties were not present in local governments. The councillors then were appointed by the Military Governors of the States. If one admits as they claimed that, they were appointed as representatives of their communities, they had no political programmes or manifestos as parties do. Although they try not to play that game like the officers, they are obliged to listen to officers because of their lack of experience in council work. They have been councillors for only nine months. We will be talking about the problem of experience later.

One of the reasons that has been advanced for bureaucratic control is expertise. The officers are regarded as experts who have in front of them amateur politicians who are less qualified. The professional knowledge that is often associated with officers allow them to be more at ease than councillors who are not experts when it comes to treating technical issues. As far as the three local governments are concerned, one can not make a general statement. The situation differs from one local government to the other and from one

local government department to the other. During the course of our research, we studied the educational profiles of both councillors and officers in the local governments. We should, once again, state that those councillors having been appointed by the military, were more qualified than those we were familiar with at that level. We found out that all, but one councillor then had gone above the West African School Certificate (WASC). The professional qualifications of officers in general include about more than 60% who have done the Diploma in Local Government Studies, many university graduates, few postgraduate degree holders and two to three accountants. The officers are in a more advantageous position than the councillors in terms of educational qualifications.

Most councillors at the period of our research were nominated directly supervisory councillors by the State Government. In most of these nominations, the professional qualification of the councillors were not considered. This explains why a business woman with just a WASC was appointed supervisory councillor of health, or a former company clerk as supervisory councillor of education. In these two cases, we discovered that the officers in the departments actually dominate policy formulation. The supervisory councillors admitted this themselves. Most of them accepted that they only approve what the officers bring to them. But in some departments, we also met councillors who are vast in their fields, and who do more than listening to their officers. The qualifications of supervisory councillors vis-à-vis the departments they control was also one of the reasons adduced for the lack of development at the local level. One of the councillors elected in 1987, while talking about the problems in her council lamented that a former village teacher could be made supervisory councillor of health.²³

One other argument that is always used to justify bureaucratic control is the time spent by officers in the council. The hypothesis is that: since councillors devote less time to their municipal function—because they keep in most cases their original jobs—officers that do just that seize the opportunity to deal with important issues in the absence of the former. This hypothesis is fastly fading away. Most councillors now devote all their time to their council work. This new development troubles most officers who see their work being taken over by councillors, especially supervisory councillors.²⁴ This is what is known as the professionalization of elective functions. This is what is gradually

happening in Nigeria since 1976. Before 1976, we had councillors who were at the same time civil servants or teachers. Since the famous 1976 Reforms, a prospective local government councillor is supposed to resign from any other post he occupies before the elections. This prohibition is confirmed in 1989 Constitution; Section 288(2) for the Chairman and 300(1) for councillors. Most of the councillors we interviewed told us they come to their respective local governments everyday like the officers. This reduces the advantage of the later, in respect of the time spent by both in the council, as far as their role in decision-making is concerned. But this does not neglect the fact that officers still have more advantage over councillors, especially if we take into consideration the term of office of the later or rather the length of time they spend in their functions.

Under normal circumstances, a councillor is elected for three years. One could say that a councillor would need his first term to study how things function at the local level. It is after that, i.e. from his second term that he could really boast of knowing how the council functions. But in Nigeria, it is very rare for councillors to finish their first mandate, not to talk of the second. Between 1980 and 1990, we had five different councils, which gives us an average term of two years (see table below):

The length of time spent by councillors in their posts between 1980 and 1990

<i>Years</i>	<i>Length of time</i>
1980-1983	36 months
1984-1986 (March)	15 months
1986 (April) - 1987 (December)	21 months
1988 (January) - 1989 (July)	19 months
1990 (January) - 1990 (December)	12 months

The length of time passed by a Nigerian councillor, according to this table, is insignificant and ridiculous when one considers the fact that in France, most Mayors have been in the council for a period of 21 years before becoming Mayors and they have been occupying that post for 13 years. It means they have been in the council for a period 34 years.²⁵ The consequence in Nigeria could have been less grave if not that each time the council changes all the councillors are replaced with new ones. At the beginning of each term, all we

have is new faces who will again need to learn the council work. The absence of professionalization on the part of the councillors bring about other problems like the lack of knowledge in local management or even absence of local notables.

While councillors are having problems finishing their mandates, the officers remain and continue to accumulate experience. There are even times when officers alone remain in councils, while waiting for the nomination of new councillors. This could last for more than 10 months like in 1984. With this type of situation, it will be normal to believe that councillors are manipulated by officers, especially in their first months in office. This manipulation could even last till the end of their term of office if they don't learn fast. The permanence of officers limit the control democratic that councillors could have over them. This is because committee members and chairmen come and go while officers remain.²⁶

We can then conclude that the permanence of officers contribute to the accumulation of experience which the councillors lack. In that wise, the later depend largely on the former for almost all the informations they need for decision-making. We are now going to discuss the power over information in Nigerian councils.

The rationality of a decision depends to a large extent on the collection and assimilation of information. Information about the organization's environment, about possible alternatives and their consequences, and about the valuation of input as well as output.²⁷ This is exactly what the officers are supposed to do in decision-making. The capacity to control the circulation of information is one of the advantages that favour officers, especially the secretary to the local government.²⁸ The secretary, since the 1976 Reform, is a powerful figure. He incarnates his local government, especially with the wide powers given to him over the internal administration of the local government. The secretary could open any correspondence to the council and even reply if he feels there is urgency. The executive power given to the secretary and the continuous absence of councillors in local governments made people believe, he has more power than the chairman. This explains, we suppose, the fact that in one of the local governments we visited, there was a lot of people

waiting to see the secretary whereas the chairman and the councillors were present.

Does this not mean that the secretary is usurping the power of the councillors? This was not the opinion of our respondents. The councillors admitted that the secretary works in collaboration with them. There may be changes in this situation. The last guidelines on the application of civil service reforms to local governments has made the chairman the Chief Executive and Accounting Officer of his local government.²⁹ Accordingly, all correspondence flowing to and from the local government should now be in the name of the chairman and even when he is not around, his attention should be drawn immediately to correspondence processed in his absence.

This is an improvement. But the effect this will have on the power of the secretary in our opinion will be minimum. Most of the correspondence will come back to the officers because chairmen don't have enough experience to do it alone. This is not the first time efforts are made to reduce the influence of secretaries in Nigerian local governments. Some Northern States used a rotational system between 1977 and 1979, to make sure secretaries don't have a total grip on a particular local government.³⁰

The measures taken by the Federal Government through different reforms to curb the privileges officers have over councillors will be inefficient in as far as officers exercise a form of financial control over the chairman. According to the implementation guidelines³¹, the role of the chairman as accounting officer excludes signing vouchers and cheques. This literally means that the council can't just spend any money without the consent of two senior officers, the secretary and the treasurer. But the impact of this could be minimized with the decree allowing chairmen to personally appoint their secretaries.

CONCLUSION

We can say from the above pages that officers exert a lot of influence on decision-making processes. It won't even be an exaggeration to say that the influence is more than that exerted by councillors, who are supposed to be the guarantors of local democracy. It is true that the 1988 Reform has tried to reverse the situation by making the chairman the accounting officer and the

chief executive of the local government. But the political environment seems to favour the officers. Political instability has always interrupted councillors in the exercise of their functions. This made them to be less experienced compared to the officers who continue to work even when councillors are not there. It is this familiarity with the different issues concerning the local government that constitute the major advantage officers have over councillors. As such, the fact that the former play a more important role in decision-making than the latter in Nigerian local governments is far from being false.

NOTES

This paper is based on a study that was carried out by the writer between October and December 1990, and which was submitted to the Centre d'Etude et de Recherche sur la Vie Local (CERVL), Institut d'Etudes Politiques, University of Bordeaux I, France, as a PhD. thesis.

1. See for example, J. Egurube, "The trials of local government in Nigeria", in O. Abonisade (ed), *Readings in Nigerian Local Government*, OAU, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, 1986.
2. N.P. Helpworth, *The finance of local government*, rev. ed., London, Allen and Unwin, 1970, pp.14-15.
3. For an elaboration of this new approach, see, Ezra N. Suleiman (ed), *Bureaucrats and policy making: A comparative overview*, Holmes & Meier, New York, London, 1984, p.3.
4. At the time we were drawing our questionnaire, the Ministry of Local Government was still existing, so we decided to guide it in our analysis.
5. Federal Republic of Nigeria, *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Promulgation)* 1989, No.12, Forth Schedule, Part I.
6. This term is borrowed from Gerry Stoker. According to him, the "joint elite comprise a small group of leading councillors and officers". See, Gerry Stoker, *Politics of local government*, Macmillan, 1988, p.86.
7. It is Alan Alexander who wrote that internal organization of local governments implies the maintenance of "parallel structures", i.e. the councillor side and the officer side. See Alan Alexander, "Officers and members in the new local government system—Parallel structures and interactive processes", *Local Government Studies*, Vol.7, No.6, Nov/Dec. 1981, p.33.

8. Francis de Baecque and Jean-Louis Quermonne (eds). *Administration et politique sous la veine republicaine*. Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1981, Introduction.
9. James H. Svara, "Dichotomy and duality: Reconceptualizing the relationship between policy and administration in the relationship between policy and administration in council-manager cities", *Public Administration Review*, January/February 1985, Vol.45, No.11, pp.221-224.
10. Woodrow Wilson, "The study of administration, *Political Science Quarterly*, 2 (June 1887): 209-210. As read in B. Guy Peters, *The Politics of Bureaucracy*, New York: Longman, 2nd Edition, 1984, p.4.
11. F.J. Goodnow, *Politics and administration*, New York, 1900, as cited in Ladipo Adamolekun, *Politics and administration in Nigeria*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd, 1986, pp.13-14.
12. David Easton, *A system analysis of political life*, New York: Wiley, 1965.
13. James H. Svara, op. cit. p.222.
14. Ibid, p.224.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. For the definitions of these concepts, see Ibid, pp.224-227.
18. For the impact of military rule on the of role civil servants, see Anton Bebler, *Military Rule in Africa: Dahomey, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Mali* (New York, 1973), p.203.
19. Henry Bienen and Martin Fitton, "Soldiers, politicians and civil servants" in Keith Panter-Brick (ed), *Soldiers and Oil: The Political Transformation of Nigeria*, London, Frans Cass Crop, 1978, p.29.
20. See Anambra State Edict No.2 (Government Printer), Enugu, 1985, for the role of Sole Administrator after the coup d'etat of 1983.
21. J.E. Otiri, *Anatomy of decision-making in Warri Local Government Council*. A long essay submitted for the award of the Postgraduate Diploma in Local Government Studies, Department of Local Government Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 1988.
22. Administrative politics describe councils where senior officers will be involved in relationship with people outside their own organization with whom they will have to bargain, negotiate or consult, in a manner that has traditionally been regarded as "political". See M.J. Hill, *The Sociology of Public Administration*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972, pp.211-227.
23. See Newswatch, December 4, 1989, p.16.

24. Pierre Damien, once asked what will become of the HODs in French Municipalities as more and more supervisory councillors (Adjoints au Maire) take up their jobs on full time. See Pierre Damien, "Les élus prendront-ils la place des cadres communaux?", *La gazette des Communes et du personnel communaux*, April 1978, No.676, p.14.
25. See Albert Mabileau, "Les elections locales", in *Encyclopedie des collectivites locales*, 1979, p.41-7.
26. K.C. Wheare, *Government by committee*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1955, p.179.
27. See Robert Haynes, *Organization theory and local government*, Allen and Unwin, 1980, p.78.
28. See Norman Dennis, *Public participation and planners' blight*, London: Faber and Faber, 1972, pp.167-168.
29. Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Implementation guidelines on the application of Civil Service Reforms in the local government*, Lagos: Federal Government Printer, 1988, Para.5, pp.7-8.
30. See A.Y. Aliyu and P.H. Koehn, *Local autonomy and inter-governmental relations in Nigeria*, Zaria, ABU, 1982, p.44.
31. Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Implementation guidelines on the application of Civil Service Reforms...* Op. Cit. Para.5.1, p.7.