



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE: AN ASSESSMENT OF COMPLAINT MECHANISMS IN TARABA STATE'S BUREAU FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND CHIEFTAINCY AFFAIRS

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigates the role of complaint mechanisms in enhancing public participation and accountability within the Bureau for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs in Taraba State, Nigeria. Despite policy frameworks promoting transparency and civic engagement, implementation at the local level remains limited. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research collected quantitative data from 330 respondents through structured questionnaires and employed statistical tools such as t-tests and regression analysis to assess the relationship between complaint systems, public participation, and accountability. Findings reveal that a majority of citizens perceive existing complaint mechanisms as unclear and ineffective, with 66.7% reporting dissatisfaction with procedures for addressing misconduct, and 86.7% expressing skepticism about procurement transparency. However, statistical results indicate a significant positive relationship between effective complaint mechanisms and accountability ($F = 23.569$, $p = 0.000$), and between public participation and transparency ($F = 730.202$, $p = 0.000$, $\beta = 0.831$). The study identifies major barriers to engagement, including low civic awareness, poor institutional trust, and limited access to information. Recommendations include institutionalizing accessible grievance channels, enhancing civic education, digitizing financial records, and fostering inclusive decision-making platforms. Ultimately, the research underscores the need for systemic reforms to promote responsive, inclusive, and accountable local governance.*

KEYWORDS: Public Participation, Complaint Mechanisms, Accountability and Transparency.



INTRODUCTION

In recent years, accountability, transparency, and citizen participation have emerged as key principles in promoting good governance, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. These principles are essential for reducing corruption, improving service delivery, and enhancing public trust in government institutions. However, despite frameworks and policies aimed at reinforcing accountability, their practical implementation remains a significant challenge. Historically, Nigeria's periods of military rule contributed to opaque governance, limiting public oversight and fostering a culture of secrecy and inefficiency (Adejuwon, 2014; Momoh et al., 2025).

Since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, civil society groups, activists, and reform advocates have intensified efforts to promote transparency and hold leaders accountable. Nevertheless, issues such as financial mismanagement, poor service delivery, and inadequate access to government information persist, especially at the grassroots level. Effective governance demands both vertical accountability—between citizens and leaders—and horizontal accountability—between government institutions. The lack of functional mechanisms to handle public complaints undermines the potential for inclusive and responsive governance (Olu-Adeyemi, 2012; Oke & Atufe-Musa, 2021).

In Taraba State, governance challenges mirror national trends, with underdevelopment and inequality linked to weak accountability structures. The Bureau for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs plays a central role in administering local governance and traditional leadership. This study focuses on assessing the complaint mechanisms within the Bureau, exploring how effectively they support transparency, public engagement, and institutional accountability. By doing so, the research aims to provide insights that can inform strategies for strengthening local governance in Taraba and similar contexts across Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Although accountability, transparency, and citizen participation are widely recognized as essential to good governance, their implementation in Nigeria, particularly at the local level, remains weak. Despite the existence of policy frameworks aimed at promoting these values, enforcement is hampered by deep-rooted corruption, administrative inefficiencies, and a legacy of opaque governance from past military regimes. This has led to a lack of oversight in public institutions and limited citizen engagement, ultimately weakening trust in government and hindering development.

In Taraba State, these issues are evident within the Bureau for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, which plays a central role in grassroots governance. The Bureau lacks functional and accessible complaint mechanisms that enable citizens to report grievances, seek redress, or participate meaningfully in governance. This lack of accountability tools undermines civic participation and institutional legitimacy. As a result, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the Bureau's complaint mechanisms, identify barriers to their use, and recommend strategies to strengthen public participation and local governance in the state.



Research Objectives

- i. Assess the effectiveness of current complaint mechanisms in promoting accountability within the Bureau for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs.
- ii. Examine public awareness and engagement, identifying challenges that hinder citizens from utilizing existing complaint channels.
- iii. Recommend strategies to enhance citizen participation and strengthen oversight in local governance processes.

Research Hypotheses

H₁: There is no significant relationship between complaint mechanisms and accountability within the Bureau for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs.

H₂: Public awareness and engagement do not significantly influence the utilization of existing complaint channels.

H₃: Implementing strategic reforms does not significantly enhance citizen participation or strengthen oversight in local governance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lucky and Eke (2023) examine the state of accountability within Nigeria's local government system, emphasizing its vital connection to good governance. Their study argues that for local governments to function effectively, they must ensure transparency in managing public funds, uphold human rights, and remain accountable to citizens. Using secondary data and theoretical frameworks such as the principal-agent theory, social contract theory, and sovereignty theory, they highlight the weaknesses in accountability mechanisms. Their key recommendations include strengthening the institutional powers of the Auditor General, developing structured frameworks with clear guidelines, and implementing enforceable monitoring and reporting systems. Additionally, they stress the importance of strictly enforcing regulatory laws like the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Public Procurement Act to foster transparency and reduce corruption in local governance.

Jabulani (2017) underscores the importance of public participation and accountability in enhancing service delivery at the local government level. His study reveals that citizen involvement and holding councillors accountable significantly influence the quality and responsiveness of local governance. Without meaningful public participation, enforcing accountability becomes a challenge. Effective participation not only builds trust between local authorities and communities but also requires that citizens are well-informed about municipal processes. Jabulani calls for stronger relationships between local governments and communities, advocating for functional and inclusive participatory frameworks that ensure accountability.

Eke et al. (2018) focus on the core elements of good governance at the local government level in Nigeria: citizen participation, accountability, and transparency. Their study points to systemic crises that have hindered the successful implementation of these principles despite



institutional, organizational, and constitutional efforts. These challenges have weakened local governments' ability to fulfill their governance responsibilities effectively. The authors argue that improving governance requires stronger legislative backing, coordinated reforms, and active involvement from higher levels of government to instill a culture of good governance.

Ardigó (2019) examines the growing need for robust accountability mechanisms in local government, driven by decentralization. He emphasizes that accountability frameworks must be adaptable to different local contexts, as uniform models often fail. Ardigó highlights emerging accountability tools like digital complaint platforms, legal counseling services, media-based oversight, and participatory budgeting, which are tailored to enhance transparency and citizen involvement. His study stresses the importance of aligning these tools with local realities to strengthen good governance at the grassroots level.

Salako and Ajibade (2019) explore the relationship between accountability and transparency in local government administration, focusing on the Yewa South Local Government. They argue that these tools are crucial for improving citizen engagement and service quality. Their study reveals that accountability and transparency must be integrated into broader governance processes. Using both primary and secondary data, they suggest that local government chairmen should prioritize efficient and transparent service delivery. They also recommend that local government legislators strengthen their independence to improve oversight and contribute to more effective local governance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine public sector reforms. Data were collected from diverse sources including newspapers, websites, government records, and surveys, chosen for their accessibility and low cost. The data analysis involved descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (one sample t-test and multiple regression analysis) using SPSS software at a 0.05 significance level. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to different categories of respondents, with 330 completed questionnaires returned. The data were analyzed using frequency tables, percentages, and statistical tests to address research questions and test hypotheses related to public sector reforms and governance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Presentation of Results

This section of the questionnaire focuses on the respondent's view on complaint mechanism, public participation and accountability for local governance.

Table 1: There are clear procedures for reporting and addressing misconduct in the Bureau.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
STRONGLY DISAGREE	88	26.7	26.7
DISAGREE	132	40.0	40.0
AGREE	44	13.3	13.3
STRONGLY AGREE	66	20.0	20.0
Total	330	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The information on the table shows that the majority (about 66.7%) of respondents either disagree or strongly disagree that there are clear procedures for reporting and addressing misconduct in the Bureau. This suggests a general perception of insufficient clarity or effectiveness in the system.

Table 2: The Bureau's financial records are accessible to the public.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
STRONGLY DISAGREE	88	26.7	26.7
DISAGREE	132	40.0	40.0
NEUTRAL	44	13.3	13.3
AGREE	66	20.0	20.0
Total	330	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The result shows a significant perception of inefficiency regarding financial reporting procedures within the Bureau. A total of 66.7% of the respondents agreed that there are insufficient procedures regarding financial reporting in place. The rest of the respondents either believe that these procedures are clear, or they provided neutral responses.

Table 3: Public procurement processes in the Bureau are open and competitive.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
STRONGLY DISAGREE	220	66.7	66.7
DISAGREE	66	20.0	20.0
NEUTRAL	44	13.3	13.3
Total	330	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024



The table shows a clear trend towards disagreement with the fact that public procurement processes in the Bureau are open and competitive. About 66.7% of the respondents are of the opinion that public procurement processes in the Bureau are not totally open and competitive.

Table 4: The Bureau provides timely updates on its projects and activities.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
DISAGREE	110	33.3	33.3
AGREE	132	40.0	40.0
STRONGLY AGREE	88	26.7	26.7
Total	330	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Overall, this table shows a generally positive view of the respondents concerning the Bureau's timely provision of information about its projects and activities. While about 33.3% of the respondents disagreed, a total of 66.7% of the respondents agreed, suggesting that most respondents feel positive about the timeliness of updates provided by the Bureau.

Table 5: Decision-making processes in the Bureau are transparent and inclusive.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
DISAGREE	132	40.0	40.0
NEUTRAL	154	46.7	46.7
AGREE	44	13.3	13.3
Total	330	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Concerning decision-making processes in the Bureau, 46.7% of the respondents held a neutral position. About 40.0% disagreed with the fact that decision-making processes in the Bureau are transparent and inclusive. The rest (13.3%) agreed with the fact that decision-making processes in the Bureau are transparent and inclusive. This distribution suggests that there may be considerable disagreement among participants regarding the statement.

Table 6: The Bureau effectively engages with local stakeholders in decision-making processes.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
DISAGREE	66	20.0	20.0
NEUTRAL	176	53.3	53.3
AGREE	88	26.7	26.7
Total	330	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The majority of respondents (about 86.7%) either disagreed or remained neutral concerning the Bureau's effectiveness in engaging local stakeholders, suggesting a significant level of dissatisfaction regarding its engagement practices. About 13.3% agreed that the Bureau

engages with local stakeholders, indicating potential areas for improvement in communication and collaboration.

One Sample t-Test And Multiple Regression Analysis

H₁: There is no significant relationship between complaint mechanisms and accountability within the Bureau for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs.

Table 7: ANOVA table of effective complaint mechanism on accountability.

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	253.282	1	253.282	23.569	.000 ^a
	Residual	3524.851	328	10.746		
	Total	3778.133	329			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Complaint Mechanism

b. Dependent Variable: Accountability

Interpretation:

The result shows that effective complaint mechanisms have a significant positive impact on accountability within the Bureau for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs. With a high F-value (23.569) and a p-value of 0.000, the analysis confirms that strong complaint systems help enhance transparency and hold officials responsible for their actions. This supports the idea that accessible and responsive grievance channels play a key role in promoting good governance at the local level.

H₂: Public awareness and engagement do not significantly influence the utilization of existing complaint channels.

Table 8: Regression analysis result on public participation mechanisms and transparency in decision-making processes.

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	815.720	1	815.720	730.202	.000 ^a
	Residual	366.414	328	1.117		
	Total	1182.133	329			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Public participation mechanisms.

b. Dependent Variable: Transparency



Table 9: Regression analysis result on public participation mechanisms and transparency in decision-making processes.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	7.655	.132		57.852	.000
Public participation mechanisms	2.190	.081	.831	27.022	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Transparency

Interpretation:

The regression analysis shows a strong and statistically significant relationship between public participation mechanisms and transparency in decision-making. A high F-value (730.202) and a p-value of 0.000 indicate that public participation is a major predictor of transparency. The coefficient (B = 2.190) suggests that increased public involvement leads to higher transparency, while the high standardized beta (0.831) and t-value (27.022) confirm the strength of this effect. Despite this, practical challenges may hinder citizens from utilizing these mechanisms, including low awareness, limited access, and lack of trust or feedback. Therefore, while participation enhances transparency, efforts must be made to improve citizen engagement and remove barriers to effective use of complaint and involvement channels.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

i. Effectiveness of Complaint Mechanisms in Promoting Accountability

The findings reveal that the majority of respondents (66.7%) believe there are no clear procedures for reporting and addressing misconduct within the Bureau. This suggests a gap in formal structures for handling complaints, echoing Olowu and Wunsch (2004), who argue that weak institutional complaint channels undermine local government accountability in Africa.

However, regression analysis from Table 7 supports the notion that effective complaint mechanisms significantly improve accountability ($F = 23.569$, $p = 0.000$). This aligns with Bovens, Goodin and Schillemans (2014), who emphasize that accessible and responsive complaint systems help enforce ethical conduct and transparency in public administration.

ii. Public Awareness and Engagement: Challenges in Utilizing Complaint Channels

The data highlights limited public access to financial records (66.7% disagree) and negative perceptions regarding the openness of procurement processes (86.7% disagree or remain neutral). This reflects findings by Fox (2015), who identifies “opaque governance” as a major constraint to public accountability.

Regression results (Tables 8 and 9) confirm that public participation significantly influences transparency in decision-making ($F = 730.202$, $p = 0.000$, Beta = 0.831). Despite this statistical relationship, qualitative patterns in responses—particularly neutrality in decision-making and



stakeholder engagement—suggest challenges such as low civic awareness, poor communication, and weak institutional trust (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012).

iii. Recommendations for Strengthening Citizen Participation and Oversight

Although 66.7% of the respondents feel the Bureau provides timely updates on its activities, perceptions regarding inclusive decision-making remain low (only 13.3% agree it's transparent and inclusive). Furthermore, 86.7% of the respondents either disagreed or stayed neutral about stakeholder engagement practices. These findings point to a need for systemic reforms that foster open dialogue and institutionalize participatory channels.

Scholars like Cornwall and Schattan (2007) argue that participatory governance thrives when institutional incentives align with citizen engagement. Strengthening community-based feedback mechanisms, digital access to records, and regular stakeholder consultations could significantly enhance public trust and oversight.

CONCLUSION

This study assessed the role of complaint mechanisms in fostering public participation and accountability within the Bureau for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs in Taraba State. The findings indicate that despite the existence of policies and structures, the practical implementation of complaint mechanisms remains weak. Most respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the clarity, accessibility, and effectiveness of grievance procedures. Additionally, while statistical analysis confirmed a strong relationship between public participation and transparency, actual citizen engagement was found to be low, hindered by limited awareness, lack of trust, and institutional opacity.

The study concludes that effective complaint mechanisms and active public involvement are essential for improving transparency and accountability at the grassroots level. However, to realize these goals, there is a critical need for reforms that enhance the responsiveness, inclusivity, and accessibility of governance processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. **Institutionalize Clear and Accessible Complaint Procedures:** The Bureau should develop and publicize standardized procedures for lodging complaints. These should include physical help desks, anonymous whistleblower options, and user-friendly digital platforms.
- ii. **Enhance Public Awareness and Civic Education:** Targeted awareness campaigns are needed to inform citizens of their rights, the existence of complaint mechanisms, and how to engage them. Partnerships with civil society organizations, traditional rulers, and media can amplify outreach.
- iii. **Digitize and Open Financial and Procurement Records:** Transparency can be improved by making budgetary, procurement, and project records easily accessible through a dedicated online portal.



- iv. **Strengthen Stakeholder Engagement Frameworks:** Create participatory platforms such as town hall meetings, stakeholder forums, and participatory budgeting exercises that actively involve citizens in decision-making processes.
- v. **Regular Monitoring and Evaluation:** The Bureau should establish an internal accountability unit to monitor complaint resolutions, public feedback, and participation rates. Periodic audits and public reports will help build trust.

Areas for Further Research

- i. **Comparative Studies Across Local Governments:** Future research could compare complaint mechanisms and public engagement strategies across multiple local government areas in Taraba or other Nigerian states to identify best practices and regional variations.
- ii. **Impact Assessment of Civic Education Programs:** Evaluating how public awareness campaigns influence citizen engagement and complaint submission rates could help refine future outreach strategies.
- iii. **Gender and Vulnerable Groups' Access to Complaint Mechanisms:** Further studies can explore how different social groups—particularly women, youth, and rural communities—interact with accountability structures and what barriers they face.

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