

Why Kaduna State Government is restructuring districts and village units

Being press statement by Alhaji Jafaru Sani, Commissioner of Local Government Affairs, on the restructuring of districts and village units in Kaduna State; Sir Kashim Ibrahim House, 11th June 2017

Gentlemen of the Press,

I wish to update you on the exercise the Kaduna State Government is implementing to restructure districts and village units in all its 23 local government councils.

There are 32 emirs and chiefs in Kaduna State. Ten of our traditional rulers are first class chiefs; nine are ranked as second-class while 13 are graded as third class. It is the duty of the state government to pay the salaries and allowances of all the 32 chiefs. The state government is very happy and conscientious in discharging its duty to support all our 32 chiefs. And the state government shall continue to be responsible for all our graded chiefs.

As part of its continuous discharge of this responsibility to our chiefs and emirs, the state government is concluding the the purchase of official vehicles for distribution to the third-class chiefs. The replacement of the official cars for first and second class chiefs will follow, in a phased programme.

The state government maintains the palaces for all graded chiefs, and has recently renovated 10 palaces.

Below our emirs and chiefs is a cadre of district heads. There are 390 district heads in Kaduna State. By the provision of the Local Government Administration Law (2012), it is the responsibility of the local government councils to cater for them.

One of the problems this government inherited is the practical insolvency of many local government councils. There is such a mismatch between their revenues and their expenses that some local government councils are unable to pay their bills, especially salaries, without support from the state government. The bloated wage bills of these councils indicate that they are carrying more than they can bear. That is why for two years many local government councils were unable for two years to pay their district and

village heads. Due to the Governor’s kind intervention, at least 85% of these district and village heads have now being paid two years’ salary en bloc.

Careful scrutiny of the plight of these local government councils indicates that the cost of maintaining their district and village administrations is a constraint. But the local government councils are groaning under the weight of carrying the district heads and their personnel.

Before 2001, Kaduna State had only 77 districts and 1,429 village units. The six oldest first class emirates and chiefdoms had 37 districts, which ballooned to the following 152 districts after 2001:

	Chiefdom	Districts before 2001	Extra Districts after 2001	Total no of Districts
1.	Zazzau	22	64	86
2.	Kagoro	3	8	11
3.	Birnin-Gwari	3	13	16
4.	Moro’a	3	7	10
5.	Jaba	5	19	24
6.	Jema’a	1	4	5
	Total	37	115	152

With the creation of 313 additional districts in 2001, the state now had 390 districts and 5,882 village units.

As seen above, the number of district heads for the six oldest first class chiefdoms more than tripled. This meant that the cost to the local government councils of maintaining the district heads automatically tripled as well. All our 23 local government councils have since then had to bear this imposed burden.

The consequence of imposing the cost of supporting these extra 313 districts on the local government councils was to increase their wage bills. With each district having seven personnel, this meant that the 390 districts have increased the wage bill of the councils by 2,730 persons. Thus, Lere LGA spends N84.5m on its district heads yearly; Chikun N77.2m while for the same period Zangon-Kataf spends N165m, more than its monthly allocation.

What accounts for this proliferation in the number of district heads appears to be nothing other than political expediency. We have not seen any objective criteria or a strategic consideration that concluded that the

proliferation of districts was either sustainable or crucial to delivering public goods or promoting harmony at the grassroots.

Even the excuse of population growth will not hold. Kano State, which has a much bigger population than Kaduna State, has only 44 districts for its 44 local government areas. Zazzau Emirate alone has 86 districts, spread across 11 local government areas. Katsina has only 33 district heads.

In any case, insinuating that population growth is correlated to increasing the number of districts is not logical. Why has such growth not also increased the number of chiefs, emirs, governors, and perhaps, even presidents. The cold truth is that these things were done without thorough consideration of the implications.

This government has decided to resolve the situation in the longer-term interest of the state. Our local governments must be freed from the stranglehold of bloated payrolls so that they can devote more of their resources to providing public goods.

A committee was assigned the duty of studying the situation and making recommendations to the government. The committee on the restructuring of district and village administration has since submitted its report.

On 24th April 2017, the report of the committee on restructuring district and village administration in Kaduna State was considered by the Kaduna State Executive Council.

The resolutions of the Executive Council were discussed with our Emirs and Chiefs at an emergency meeting on Tuesday, 25th April 2017. The chiefs requested for two weeks to discuss the matter and avail the state government of their recommendations. Our State Council of Chiefs has since forwarded to government its acceptance of the decision to restructure the districts and village units, with their own additional suggestions.

Following respectful consideration of the submission from the Council of Chiefs, the Kaduna State Government has decided to implement the following decisions to improve the administration of districts and village units:

1. Kaduna State will revert to the 77 districts and 1,429 village that it had prior to 2001;
2. Each district will be administered through seven personnel, including the District Head. The approved establishment of each district has already been conveyed to the Traditional Councils by the Ministry for Local Government Affairs;
3. The District Scribe, who is the secretary to the District Head, will be a career civil servant and an appointee of the Local Government Service Commission, while other personnel of the district will be on an allowance to be decided by their respective local government councils;
4. Our Royal Fathers shall nominate three persons for appointment as district heads for the 77 districts from within the current 390 and from without, at their discretion. The process of nominating the heads of the 77 restored districts is being opened up and will be initiated by the Emirs and Chiefs to enhance the prospects of selecting persons that best fit the criteria;
5. The Ministry for Local Government Matters shall review the resumes submitted, screen the nominees and obtain security reports before recommending to the Governor for approval or otherwise;
6. All the current District and Village heads that will be disengaged are to be paid three months' salary in lieu of notice.

In a 14th February 1991 circular, the then government of Kaduna State directed the Local Government Service Commission to advise *“all Emirate and Traditional Councils that the appointments of District Heads is not hereditary which means that whenever the post becomes vacant, all persons within the district will be eligible to contest.”*

As we have often said, this government was elected to make the tough, but necessary, decisions to cut waste, promote efficiency and empower the institutions that facilitate governance at all levels.

The creation of offices, titles and units for persons who are then paid from public coffers cannot be an endless exercise. In the absence of scientific criteria or clear strategic considerations, this Government is not obliged to accept the proliferation of districts just because it inherited them. Our duty is to uphold that which is laudable and consequential, while finding the courage to limit what amounts to excess.

Government believes that its decision in this regard will boost the functioning and performance of our local government system. Let us all support this decision, devoid of unwarranted sentiments, baseless speculations and outright lies. We thank the Kaduna State Council of Chiefs for supporting this decision and for responding promptly to consultation by the government.